

**“WHERE TWO OR MORE”  
THE POWER OF PRAYING TOGETHER**

**A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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**OCTOBER 1, 2006**

*To Cari, Stefani and Geoffrey*

*God has truly blessed us through His kindness in prayer.*

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## PREFACE

There is a beauty in united prayer which points to the very presence of God. Jesus promised that “where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus lifts the curtain of the Most Holy Place, and beckons us to enter in.<sup>2</sup>

I regard sincere and humble united prayer with a sense of wonder for the simple reason that Jesus is in it. It is His presence which makes every difference in the life and work of the church. Where His presence is felt, love is evident and lives are transformed. It is the difference between peace and programs, human effort and the activity of God. When He draws near enough for us to brush the hem of His garment, we are blessed.

I learned that from personal experience.

When I was growing up, my family moved inland from the booming San Diego area to the rural desert of Southern California. We left a vibrant and active church of over a thousand members for one with fewer than fifty. But it was in the smaller church that God’s presence drew near in a way I had never known before.

It was the praying I noticed first. There was the row of little old ladies with “blue” hair who always sat in the same row, and prayed me through my adolescence. They were the same ones who wrote me after I left home as a foreign exchange student to remind me that their praying had not stopped. There was the pastor and his wife, long past their prime, who took the time to graciously listen to whatever question I had (and I had a lot of them). There was old Mr. Gibbs, who took me and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:20, NIV.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:19-25, NIV.

my best buddy fishing. He also set an example with other men of the church by going forward to the church altar on special Sundays to intercede in prayer. I can still hear their voices as they encouraged others in prayer before the Lord.

Over time, I came to understand that there was a dynamic power in that little desert church that defied its lack of size. I heard God call me to ministry there at age 13, when being a pastor was the farthest thing from my mind. I fought that call for years, but could not escape that certain *something* at work among us. Only later did I understand that it was the very presence of God at work. Like Jacob waking up, I could say “The Lord was in this place, and I was not aware of it!”<sup>3</sup>

Looking back, I believe the deep and lasting impact God made on my life through the people of that little desert church was in direct proportion to the faithfulness of their praying. The more I search the Old and New Testaments, the more I discover the power God offers His people when they pray together. Whenever revival occurs throughout history, sooner or later it becomes evident that somewhere, someone is praying.

I will remain grateful all of my life to Drs. Garth Rosell and Robert Mayer of the Gordon-Conwell faculty for their unflagging faith and instruction throughout the “Revival and Reform” doctor of ministry process. I owe every colleague in the class a debt of gratitude for their support and their prayers, especially Joel Collier for his sense of humor and “bloodhound nose” for research, Kerry Skinner and Devin Bell for their practical insights, and Steve Witte for his quiet encouragement along the way.

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 28:19, NIV.

I am also indebted to the members of Peace Church of Durham, North Carolina, who have prayed for their pastor as few churches can. I am deeply grateful to Bruce Gray, who kindly plodded through early thesis drafts without complaint. I am also indebted to Dr. Bill Wilson for his keen, plainspoken insights and continual zeal for prayer.

Most of all, I am thankful for my wife, Cari, and children, Stefani and Geoffrey, who have endured with me and loved me throughout this “life-work.” You are a joy and gift.

*To God above all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our One True Light coming into the world, be prayer, adoration and glory evermore!*

**Abstract:**

**Where Two Or More**

***The Power of Praying Together***

This work emphasizes the vital importance of united prayer for the church. This work begins with the observation that churches do not pray together as they once did, and maintains that there is a correlation between a lack of united prayer and culture becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity. The author maintains that through united prayer, God offers the opportunity to achieve progress which will not occur through any other means.

After examining Biblical precedents for praying together in the Old and New Testaments, including the life of Jesus and the practice of the early church, this work assesses the challenge of maintaining a practical balance between prayer and action in the life of the church and individual believers. Using a number of examples and anecdotes from the history of the church, the author offers several concepts for implementing united prayer in the local church. This project concludes with an examination of the Biblical concept of perseverance in prayer, and the interactive relationship between our prayers and the will of God. Several appendices provide chapter study questions, resources for united prayer, a design for a simple prayer meeting, and a covenant for Christians desiring to pray together.

## Introduction

The world knows little of the works wrought by prayer.

D.L. Moody, “How to Pray”<sup>1</sup>

Churches do not pray together as they once did. There was a time when prayer meetings were commonplace in the American church, but over the past century they have been gradually replaced by evening services, midweek Bible studies, or no meeting at all.

It is no coincidence that the culture we live in has become increasingly hostile to Christianity at the same time that united prayer has gone out of the church. A church without prayer is a church without power. Many believers today have yet to experience the power and presence of God in response to fervent, humble, united prayer.

But the flame has not died. God’s Spirit is sparking new interest in praying together. Though a growing number recognize the need for it, they still do not understand how to approach it practically. This knowledge belongs to previous generations who sought God together on their knees.

We have much to learn about praying together from the Old and New Testaments, and from those in the history of our faith who sounded the call to pray together and saw God move powerfully as a result. The past is prologue to a promising future, if we learn from its lessons and teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> D.L. Moody, “How To Pray,” in Commending The Faith, ed. Garth Rosell (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), p. 189.

The goal for “*Where Two Or More*” is to encourage people to pray together in simple, scriptural ways that entreat God for a fresh work of grace in our time. We’ll take a look at the lost art of praying together. We’ll investigate what Jesus taught and practiced when it came to praying with others. We’ll consider inspiring examples of praying together from history. We will also look at the special ways God blesses people who pray together, and consider several practical ideas for successful united prayer.

Renewal in the church is God’s sovereign work, and cannot be manipulated or programmed by human effort. But God in His mercy allows our prayers to move His hand. Throughout His Word, God has pointed us to dependent, united prayer as a means of seeking His face and calling down His blessing. There is joy in the journey, and discovery awaits. As Richard Lovelace points out, “If all regenerate church members in Western Christendom were to intercede daily simply for the most obvious spiritual concerns visible in their homes, their workplaces, their local churches and denominations, their nations, and the world and the total mission of the body of Christ within it, the transformation which would result would be incalculable.”<sup>2</sup>

Prayer is work. But in the teamwork of prayer there is profound reward. When we do the work of prayer together, we find ourselves caught up in God’s presence and purpose, and our world is transformed in ways that would never occur otherwise. God meets the obedient, faithful prayer of ordinary people with immeasurable blessing.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1979), p. 160.

Praying together isn't a panacea for every challenge in the church. But given its place in Scripture and history, we do well to ask: are we missing something today? Could it be that we've lost something precious, something that has been given by God to make a vital difference in our work for the Kingdom?

God's promises for people who pray together are beyond counting. They call us back to a narrow and ancient path that opens out into a wide place of beauty and blessing. God's Word through Jeremiah speaks to our need:

"...Stand at the crossroads and look;

Ask for the ancient paths,

Ask where the good way is, and walk in it,

And you will find rest for your souls...<sup>3</sup>"

Great things await those who seek God together in prayer. Let's draw closer, and take a look.

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 6:16, NIV.

## **Chapter One:**

**“Me? Pray With Others?”**

***Discovering What We Are Missing***

Prayer moves that arm which moves all things else.

C.H. Spurgeon, “The Special Prayer Meeting”<sup>1</sup>

“Sorry, I’m just not into it.”

Jim didn’t have any trouble turning down my invitation to our church’s prayer meeting that night. I couldn’t blame him. There was a time in my life when I felt the same way.

Let’s be honest. Prayer meetings aren’t at the top of most people’s lists of “favorite things to do.” They don’t even make the top ten. If you want to clear a room, try calling out “Let’s have a prayer meeting!” You may be surprised at how quickly it works.

The last thing I want to do is make someone feel guilty for not praying with others. For many, mention of prayer meetings evokes images of a faithful few gathered in a dusty corner of the church library, going over long lists of health concerns ranging from in-grown toenails to obscure requests (from distant relatives of friends). More time is spent discussing what to pray about than actually doing it. No wonder some say “Thanks, but no thanks!”

There is a better way. Jesus intended united prayer to be a source of real power and encouragement for believers. Go back to the earliest days of the church, and you’ll find the first Christians hungering for the chance to pray together. Nothing of significance in the history of the church has happened without the heartfelt

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Special Prayer Meeting,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 21:540.

devotion of committed prayer. Think of Martin Luther's famous comment, "I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."<sup>2</sup> Or John Wesley's observation that "God does nothing but in answer to prayer."<sup>3</sup> Both recognized prayer among the greatest priorities of their lives, at the very heart of maintaining a vital relationship with their Lord. It is how they found the strength to live for Him through the challenges of their times.

There is no greater need in the church today than for people to recapture the wonder of praying together. Why *together*? Jesus underscored the importance of praying with others when He said, "if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."<sup>4</sup> Jesus makes it clear that when we pray together, we evoke a response from God that would not happen if we simply sought Him on our own. Andrew Murray, in his classic book With Christ In The School of Prayer, points out that the word "agree" is from the Greek *sumphoneo*, the root of our English word symphony.<sup>5</sup> When we pray together in the harmony that Jesus alone can give, it is music to God's ears. There are things God has chosen to accomplish only through the united prayers of His people. I could pray a lifetime on my own, and never come close to achieving what I could through praying with others.

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<sup>2</sup> E.M. Bounds, The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds On Prayer, (Grand Rapids. MI: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 461.

<sup>3</sup> Alvin J. Vander Griend, The Praying Church Sourcebook, (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1997), p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 18:18, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Murray, With Christ In The School of Prayer, (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1999), p. 122.

## Divide and Conquer

In May of 1934 in Charlotte, North Carolina, there was a small prayer meeting at a dairy farm. A group of Christian men prayed for God to raise up a person from their area who would preach the Gospel throughout the earth. A few months later, the teenage son of the farmer committed his life to Jesus during an evangelistic campaign. His name was Billy Graham.<sup>6</sup>

I have to wonder what would have happened, if they hadn't prayed that day. When we don't rely on God through prayer, we miss out on what He alone can do. The strategy of the devil has been to divide and conquer. We live in an individualistic era, where many go through life isolated from God and each other in a desperate quest for self-fulfillment. Even Christians reflect the same trend, functioning independently of each other without the checks, balances and benefits that naturally occur when we pray together. How different that is from the early church, where "all the believers were one in heart and mind."<sup>7</sup> It's clear from the dynamic faith and impact of the early church that God has something far better in mind than the isolation and individualistic self-actualization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The New Testament tells us that God is "able to do *immeasurably more* than all *we ask or imagine*, according to His power that is at work within us."<sup>8</sup> Note that the language is in plural form. The assumption here is that we will be asking, and asking *together*! When we seek God from the heart, God moves in ways that transcend human means and comprehension. Good as our plans and efforts may be,

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<sup>6</sup> This information is from a plaque at the Frank Morrow Graham Academic Center at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 4:32 NIV

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 3:20, NIV, emphasis mine.

they cannot compare with the power and resources of our wise and faithful God.

United prayer opens the door wide to watching Him work in a way we have never encountered before.

Henry Blackaby wrote in Experiencing God, “I think God is crying out to us and shouting, ‘Don’t just do something. Stand there! Enter into a love relationship with Me. Get to know me. Adjust your life to Me.’”<sup>9</sup> Our Heavenly Father welcomes us into the wonder of watching Him work, and invites us to join Him in the greatest and most fulfilling adventure of life. That requires yielding ourselves to God in a new level of trust, but the reward is incalculable.

### **Asking Our Father to Help Us**

Imagine two small children trying to move a rock in their back yard.

“PUSH!” They yell encouragement to each other, but the rock won’t budge.

Their father, who asked them to try and move it, is watching from a few yards away.

“One, two, THREE!”

They try again. But no matter how much they push or pry, they get nowhere.

“Have you tried everything you could?” their father asks.

“EVERYTHING!” they yell back in unison. “We can’t do it! We’ve tried and tried and it’s just too big!”

“There is one thing you haven’t tried,” Dad says gently with a smile in his voice.

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Blackaby and Claude V. King, Experiencing God. (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), p. 19.

“What’s that?”

*“You haven’t asked me to help you.”*

I’ve *lived* that story. As a pastor and church planter serving active churches, I rarely met a program I didn’t like. I found myself continually on the lookout for new ones, always anticipating the next “big idea.” There were no shortage of catalogues and websites with an impressive presentation to point me in the “right direction,” and there always seemed to be someone who could tell me what the latest “cutting edge” materials were. There was enough to keep me busy and my church occupied with activities through the seasons for decades to come. There was only one problem.

I had not asked my Father to help me.

If you had asked me, I would have told you I believe in the power of God to answer prayer. “Sure, I pray” I would tell you. “Every day.” But realistically, the time I spent was minimal: a brief prayer with devotions in the morning, a hurried request between phone calls in the afternoon. The time I spent praying *with others* was even less. In many ways, I was busily relying on my own strength, acting in the vacuum of my own best impressions of what God wanted me to do. As a result, I was missing something very special from God.

George Barna recently surveyed several hundred senior pastors to determine their top three ministry priorities. Discipleship and spiritual development ranked highest (47% listed it as a priority). Evangelism and outreach were also right up there (46%). Preaching rounded out third place (35%). But prayer wasn’t even in the

running. Only three percent of pastors listed it among their primary priorities for ministry.<sup>10</sup>

Visit many churches today and you'll find Christians busy with every activity imaginable. You will notice studies and support groups for every possible situation, many of which are genuinely helpful and meet real needs. But what you will not find is heartfelt, united prayer occupying a central role in peoples' lives. Here and there you will notice churches with notable efforts to champion prayer, or excellent efforts such as The Lighthouse Prayer Movement or the National Day of Prayer. But look at the vast majority of churches, and these efforts are still the exception and not the norm. If praying together were the norm, there would be a special emphasis on praying together in most churches every week. The truth is, many today simply have yet to discover how much it matters for us to seek God together on our knees.

### **An Opportunity Not To Be Missed**

Though I was raised in a genuinely Christian home, I did not pray with my own father until I was a seminary student in my twenties. As a child, there were bedtime prayers, and there were always prayers before meals, but that was the extent of it. The closest I came to praying with others would be to *tell* someone "I will pray for you." I meant it sincerely, but often I would move on to the next thing in my life, and not remember to pray later.

Then I met John. John Holecek attended the first church I served as an associate pastor right out of seminary. He is a bold believer whose life was radically

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<sup>10</sup> George Barna. "Church Priorities for 2005 Vary Considerably," article posted on *Barna.org*, 14 February, 2005.

turned around by God. He went from abusing drugs in the 1960s to smuggling Bibles behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. One Sunday morning John and I were talking after worship when someone approached us and began to share a problem they were struggling with. I responded with a well-intended, “I will pray for you” (meaning “later, on my own”), and John jumped on it: “Yes! Let’s do that right now! That way we won’t forget to do it later!” He quietly bowed his head and prayed aloud on the spot, caring for the person and their need in a wonderful way. In that moment I was taught a lesson I would remember as long as I live. Praying with others is an *opportunity*, not a burden.

The truth is that many of us would genuinely like to be able to pray with others, but we feel awkward when we try it. We may have even come to believe that the task is best left only to those with the spiritual gift of intercessory prayer (intercession is not one of my primary spiritual gifts, so if you have felt that way, I know how you feel!).

Learning how to pray with others has been a slow work of God’s grace in my life. It did not come naturally. But along the way God has showed me that one of the greatest opportunities of life on earth is heartfelt, devoted, united prayer. If you have ever thought, “Me, pray with others? Not likely!” this book is for you.

The purpose of this book is to encourage you to enter into the wonder of what can really happen when Christians pray together. We will take a look at what God has to say about it in His Word, and consider a very special promise Jesus made (and keeps!) to believers who seek Him on their knees. We will examine ways God has moved powerfully in response to those who prayed together in the past, changing

human history forever. We will also consider practical approaches we can personally take to encounter the lasting blessings God pours out on those who pray.

### **Keeping Our Head**

Even though we may not be accustomed to doing it, God intends praying together to be the normal practice for believers in every century. Henry Blackaby's perspective is again helpful here: "We are not to function according to our own understanding, but we are to trust in the One who is the Head of the church. He is able to reveal the Father's will and bring the body into harmony to accomplish His purposes, but we will only know what the Lord desires if we spend adequate time in prayer."<sup>11</sup>

Praying together enables the body of Christ to function as it was intended, with all parts receiving direction from the Head. It empowers us to have the mind of Christ and catch God's vision for the future, with the insight He alone can breathe into every situation in life. Uniting in prayer enables us to stand in His wisdom and function in His strength. If we are not doing that, we're "standing" on our own heads, operating in our own limited wisdom with the rest of the world around us. And your head, as G.K. Chesterton pointed out, is a "very weak pedestal to stand on."<sup>12</sup>

The glory of God is always the true goal of our prayers. Jesus said "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son *may bring glory* to the Father."<sup>13</sup> How does this happen? Pastor and author John Piper explains: "Prayer is the open

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<sup>11</sup> Henry and Melvin Blackaby. Experiencing God Together. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 2002), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Chesterton, G.K. Orthodoxy. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1959), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> John 14:13, NIV, emphasis mine.

admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that He will provide the help we need.

Prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the greatest minds that America has ever produced, Jonathan Edwards, noted that prayers for God’s glory occur throughout the Bible: “Christ teaches us, that it becomes His disciples to seek this above all other things, and make it the first and the last in their prayers, and that every petition should be put up in subordination to the advancement of God’s kingdom and glory in the world.”<sup>15</sup> This is at the heart of what it means to pray in Jesus’ name: we pray for the very purpose He lived for, and are caught up in the wonder and worth of the desire of His heart, because our ultimate happiness lies in Him.

This does not mean that we do not pray for personal concerns or that they do not matter to God. They matter deeply, and God has promised to care for them. Jesus summed up the matter when He said, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”<sup>16</sup> Everything is placed in the perspective of the majesty and goodness of God. We exist to love Him and serve His purposes, and He will always prove Himself faithful. Bryan Chapell writes, “When we perceive the greatness and goodness of our God, our prayers become not so much a seeking after God for our purposes but an offering of ourselves for *His* purposes... Such commitment springs from the faith that when we pray in

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<sup>14</sup> John Piper, Desiring God, (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), p. 161.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth.” The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume II, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998). p. 291.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 6:33, NIV.

Jesus' name, He will give us the desires of our heart because our heart's greatest joy will be for His will to be done. We seek to have all our prayers and all that is in them honor the name of our infinitely wise, powerful, and loving Savior, knowing that when He is most honored, we are most blessed.”<sup>17</sup>

### **The Journey of An Eternal Lifetime**

God invites us on the journey of an eternal lifetime when we pray together. United prayer is a foretaste of heaven itself, where “a great multitude that no one could count” will bow before the Lamb of God.<sup>18</sup>

Would you like to bring glory to God? Would you like to sense the presence of God more powerfully in your life? Do you desire to see others touched, helped and blessed in ways you never imagined? Would you like to see heaven touch earth, and things accomplished that God alone can do? Would you like to be used of God to make a lasting impact for His Kingdom?

Then read on. The journey is waiting, and God is holding out His hand.

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<sup>17</sup> Bryan Chapell, Praying Backwards, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), pp. 29-30.

<sup>18</sup> The Revelation 7:9-10. NIV.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **The Lost Art of Praying Together**

#### ***Finding Help In Unexpected Places***

All through the church of God the true progress is in proportion to the prayer.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Special Prayer Meeting”<sup>1</sup>

On September 11, 2001, Cari (my wife) and I held an emergency prayer meeting in our home. Members of our church dropped what they were doing and filled our living room that evening, interceding for our nation and the victims of the Twin Towers tragedy.

A half-hour into the meeting, there was a knock on the door. It opened to a man we had never seen before.

“I saw the cars,” he said, “and thought you might be praying together. I hope you don’t mind if I join you. I just *had* to do *something*.”

Though we have had a number of prayer meetings in our home since that night, nothing like that has happened since. Strangers just don’t beat a path to our door asking to pray.

People were driven to pray after September 11. Worship attendance spiked for months across the country. Prayer meetings and vigils were held coast to coast. As footage from the Twin Towers’ collapse aired hourly and the death toll mounted, a widespread sense of foreboding held the nation in its grip. The magnitude of the tragedy was so great many felt they could do nothing less than fall on their knees and look up to heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, “The Special Prayer Meeting,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, (Rio, WI: Ages Software), 21:553.

## What If We Ask?

True prayer begins where our resources end. When times get hard, we are confronted with the reality of our own limitations. It is then we reach for the help God alone can give.

But God has been there all along. God is *always* available, waiting. The infinite wisdom and resources of our Heavenly Father are poised and waiting, ready to be released into our lives. What if we made a habit of praying more often, on our own and with others? What positive, heaven-sent changes would occur? What blessings would happen that would not occur if we did not ask? God's Word through the prophet Jeremiah holds incredible potential for us: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."<sup>2</sup> We don't know the difference our prayers will make unless we try.

Imagine a woman just arriving in heaven. An angel is showing her around when she notices a number of beautiful golden boxes, each with a name embossed on it in elaborate lettering.

"What are those?" she asks. "Is there one with my name?"

"There is," the angel replied, "but you may not want to know what's inside."

"Why is that?"

"Because it contains every blessing, strength and grace you should have asked for on earth, but never did."

Sometimes we may think of prayer as "boring" because we have been molded by modern media's five-second sound bites and instant results. We often make prayer our last resort, instead of our first. Though culturally *we* may not be

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 33:3, NIV.

conditioned today to wait together on the Lord in prayer, history is filled with accounts of believers who prayed with passion and perseverance, and saw God move powerfully as a result.

We need to discover the lost art of praying together. Many who practiced this art lived generations ago, but a record has been kept of the truths they learned along the way. The Old Testament contains powerful, poignant examples of what God does when His people pray.

There are certain blessings that God only has in store for people who seek Him together, from the heart. Take a look at what God did in the past when His people prayed, and you will be encouraged to pray as well.

In this chapter, we'll make a careful search of several places in the Old Testament where the prayers of God's people made all the difference.

### **Praying Together In Unexpected Places**

One of the first examples of united prayer in the Old Testament may surprise you. It doesn't really look like a prayer meeting, and it happens in an unlikely place. Moses, Aaron and Hur are standing on a hill overlooking the battle as Joshua leads Israel against the Amalekites. The 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus describes the course of the battle through the day: "As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands

remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.”<sup>3</sup>

Why was Moses holding up his hands? Moses was doing more than simply holding up his staff. Moses was *praying*. Aaron and Hur physically held Moses up before God when he did not have the strength to stand, desperately seeking God’s intervention together.

Standing with your hands upraised is a common posture of prayer in both the Old and New Testament.<sup>4</sup> God’s Word tells us that Moses was a mighty intercessor. The Bible records numerous instances of how he prayed for his people and God intervened in miraculous ways. Exodus even tells of how “the Lord *relented*” from destroying Israel when Moses interceded for them.<sup>5</sup> Moses’ prayers were so persuasive, they somehow even seemed to “change” God’s mind!

How could that happen, if God doesn’t change? Somehow, God allows for the interaction of our wills with His own when we pray. No matter how you may understand it theologically, the biblical and practical truth is that Moses’ prayers made an incalculable difference. And if you take a closer look, you’ll notice that when it came to seeking God’s face, Moses often wasn’t acting alone.

The Bible speaks frequently of Moses and Aaron being in the presence of God *together*. The Old Testament records the Lord speaking “to Moses *and* Aaron” seventeen different times between Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Moses was rarely alone in God’s presence when He made His will known. After all, He and

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 17:11-13, NIV.

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 32:40; Psalms 28:2, 63:4, 119:48, 134:2; Lamentations 2:19, 3:41; I Timothy 2:8.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 32:14, NIV, (emphasis mine).

Aaron had been commissioned by God to release Israel from bondage together.

Aaron was to speak to the people on Moses and God's behalf.<sup>6</sup>

### **Facedown in Prayer**

The Old Testament provides another poignant picture of Moses and Aaron praying in God's presence. During the rebellion of Korah, when several are challenging Moses' authority, the Lord threatened to destroy Israel again. The 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Numbers records that "Moses and Aaron *fell facedown* and cried out, 'O God, God of the spirits of all mankind, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?'"<sup>7</sup>

Falling face down shows humility in prayer before God, and you see it throughout the Old Testament. After Israel's unexpected loss at Ai, Joshua "*fell facedown* to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads."<sup>8</sup> When David was disciplined by God for taking a census of Israel, he "looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, *fell facedown*."<sup>9</sup> God responded to their pleas in both instances, and directed them on how they could regain His favor. On still another occasion, when Ezra (who led the first group of exiles back to Israel from Babylon) was convicted of his peoples' sin, he "was praying and confessing and weeping and throwing himself down before the

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 4:16, NIV.

<sup>7</sup> Numbers 16:22, NIV (emphasis mine).

<sup>8</sup> Joshua 7:6, NIV (emphasis mine).

<sup>9</sup> I Chronicles 21:16, NIV (emphasis mine).

house of God.” A large crowd of men, women and children gathered around him, and wept as well.<sup>10</sup>

### **Days of Prayer**

The Old Testament also records days of prayer and times when the entire nation of Israel waited before God. On the brink of civil war during the period of the judges, “the Israelites went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and they inquired of the LORD. They said, ‘Shall we go up again to battle against the Benjamites, our brothers?’”<sup>11</sup> David assembled “all Israel” for a joyful assembly of worship and prayer when the ark was brought back to Jerusalem after it had been captured by the Philistines.<sup>12</sup> Solomon did so as well for the dedication of the temple.<sup>13</sup> When the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple, Josiah called together “all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem” and renewed the Covenant “in the presence of the Lord.”<sup>14</sup> “National Days of Prayer” were well known throughout the history of Israel!

### **Fasting and Praying Together**

Later in the Old Testament, praying together occurred frequently with fasting. When the Jews were in danger of annihilation during their exile in Persia, the situation changed only after Esther asks her people to hold a prayer meeting and intercede for her: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for

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<sup>10</sup> Ezra 10:1-2, NIV (emphasis mine).

<sup>11</sup> Judges 20:23, NIV.

<sup>12</sup> I Chronicles 15:3, NIV.

<sup>13</sup> I Kings 8:2, NIV.

<sup>14</sup> II Chronicles 34:29-31, NIV.

me”<sup>15</sup> (fasting was always accompanied by prayer).<sup>16</sup> Ezra also called for a time of fasting and prayer in Babylon by the Ahava Canal before Israel’s journey out of exile, “so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children.”<sup>17</sup> On another occasion, when the Israelites arrived home under Nehemiah, they spent a day together before God fasting and confessing their sins to Him.<sup>18</sup>

### **Help When All Seems Lost**

In a way similar to what happened in our nation after September 11, times of crisis often brought God’s people to their knees. Israel “cried out” to God when they were oppressed in Egypt, and later during the period of the Judges.<sup>19</sup> Three tribes of Israel called on God in battle and “He answered their prayers, because they trusted in Him.”<sup>20</sup> When Judah was surrounded by invading armies, Jehosaphat proclaimed a fast and the people “came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek Him.” People of all ages came together to pray for God’s mercy on their nation. 2 Chronicles points out that “all the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones stood before the Lord.”<sup>21</sup>

When it seemed like all hope was lost, God’s people discovered afresh His amazing strength through waiting on Him in prayer. King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet cried out to God together when the Assyrian king Sennacherib laid siege to

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<sup>15</sup> Esther 4:16, NIV.

<sup>16</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, volume 12, Esther, (Leicester, England: Intervasity Press, 1984), p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> Ezra 8:21, NIV.

<sup>18</sup> Neh. 9:1-2, NIV.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 2:23, 14:10, Num. 20:16, Deut. 26:7, Judges 3:9, 3:15, 6:6, 10:10, NIV.

<sup>20</sup> I Chron. 5:20, NIV.

<sup>21</sup> II Chron. 19:4, 13, NIV.

Jerusalem, and God intervened miraculously.<sup>22</sup> Daniel also asked his three friends to pray when his life was in danger, so he might gain the wisdom he needed to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. All of their lives were saved as a result.<sup>23</sup>

### **A Secret Strength**

United prayer occurs so frequently in the Old Testament that we can't overlook it. Previous generations of Christians that have followed the biblical example of waiting on God together have witnessed Him move in powerful and exciting ways in response. They felt so strongly about it, that going without regular prayer together would have been unthinkable. Everything depended on it.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle in London during the latter part of the 1800s (one of the first "mega churches" in the English speaking world), felt that united prayer was the secret of his church's success through the years. He compared it to the secret of Samson's strength, and warned against ever stepping away from praying together:

The prayer-meeting is an institution which ought to be very precious to us, and to be cherished very much by us as a Church, for to it we owe everything. When our comparatively little chapel was all but empty, was it not a well-known fact that the prayer meeting was always full? And when the Church increased, and the place was scarce large enough, it was the prayer meeting that did it all. When we went to Exeter Hall, we were a praying people, indeed; and when we entered on the larger speculation, as it seemed, of the Surrey Music-hall, what cries and tears went up to heaven for our success! And so it has been ever since. It is in the spirit of prayer that our strength lies; and if we lose this, the locks will be shorn from Samson, and the Church of God will become weak as water....<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 2 Chronicles 32:20, NIV.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel 2:17-18, NIV.

<sup>24</sup> Spurgeon, "Prayer Meetings," in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 60:526.

Samson discovered that God is the true source of every strength. When God's people pray together, they do the same.

### **The Promise of Praying Together**

Zechariah, in the next to the last book of the Old Testament, prophesied that a wonderful work of God was on the way: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going ' And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat Him.'"<sup>25</sup>

Jonathan Edwards believed these words pointed to a move of God's Spirit in united prayer, and encouraged "concerts of prayer" (meaning a concerted, group effort in prayer, as described in appendix five of this work) in order to change the course of history forever.<sup>26</sup> Edwards' own words capture well the wonder and blessing of what happens when Christians genuinely seek God together: "it is one of the most beautiful and happy things on earth, which indeed makes earth most like heaven."<sup>27</sup>

Praying together in the Old Testament sets the stage for what will happen when God's Spirit is poured out on His people in the New Testament. God is about to release His presence and power in a way that has never happened before.

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<sup>25</sup> Zechariah 8:20-22 NIV.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 2, An Humble Attempt To Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People In Extraordinary Prayer For The Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom On Earth, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 295.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 295.

God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah, saying: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”<sup>28</sup> Jesus quoted this scripture the day He turned over the tables in the temple courtyard.

Jesus was also about to turn the tables on the way God’s people pray together. He made a promise that would change *everything*.

In the next chapter, we’ll take a closer look at that promise. We will discover why praying together matters so much to Jesus, and why it should matter to us.

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<sup>28</sup> Isaiah 56:7 NIV.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Praying With Jesus Then and Now**

#### ***What Jesus Taught About Praying Together***

It is Christ, praying Himself, who teaches us to pray.

Andrew Murray, *With Christ In The School of Prayer*<sup>1</sup>

One summer Sunday morning I was visiting family in California, when I found myself at The Church on the Way in Van Nuys. It was an early service, and I took a seat toward the back where I could slip out easily enough if I wanted to.

I have to admit that I went to worship that morning with more of a “spectator” mentality than I should have had. I had never visited the church before, though I had heard about it for years. I was curious about what God was doing there, and wanted to learn anything I could to take back to the church I served. I went looking for “cutting edge” ideas and exciting new programs. I ended up leaving with something far more worthwhile.

Toward the beginning of the worship service, Pastor Jack Hayford turned to the congregation and said, “This is the time where we pray for each other. I’d like to ask you to turn to one or two people beside you, and bring any concerns you may personally have before God.”

Something inside of me tensed. I was expecting your usual “pastoral” prayer for their prayer time, where I could sit passively and listen while someone else talked to God. Instead, I was being asked to open up to total strangers, and to pray myself. I was starting to look around for a way out when the lady sitting beside me smiled

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Murray, With Christ In The School of Prayer, (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1999), p. xxiii.

kindly in my direction. Then the man sitting behind us leaned forward and said, “Let’s pray.”

From that moment on, there was no turning back.

What followed was an unexpected foretaste of heaven. The young man behind us, a Korean, began to speak quietly and humbly about a sin he was struggling with. The lady beside me was black with a gentle Jamaican accent. She earnestly shared a personal need. Their candor was disarming. I mentioned my own desire to be closer to the Lord, and we bowed our heads.

As we sat there, you could hear the gentle buzz of others praying around the room. The prayers were brief and sincere, and I began to sense that far more was happening than prayer alone. I felt the unmistakable touch of God’s presence. It was as if Jesus was walking among us, ministering to each one there in a tender and personal way. It was a genuinely holy moment.

I can’t tell you anything else that happened that morning. I don’t remember the sermon or a single song. But that quiet moment in prayer will remain with me as long as I live. Jesus was in it in a way I had seldom encountered before.

It is a wonderful thing to pray with Jesus. In this chapter, we will discover what that would have been like. We will look at what Jesus did and said about praying with others, and find out how praying with Him is even possible today. When we discover that, it changes *everything*.

## Jesus' Practice of Praying With Others

For years when I would think of Jesus praying, I thought of Him withdrawing “to lonely places to pray.”<sup>2</sup> It was only later I realized that was a very small part of the picture. As I began to search the New Testament, I discovered that Jesus *loved* to pray with others. We see that from the sheer number of times He did it.

It happened when He “took Peter, John and James with him and went up on a mountain to pray.”<sup>3</sup> The disciples asked Him to “teach us to pray” after they had been watching Him pray for awhile.<sup>4</sup> Jesus prayed in the presence of others at His baptism and His transfiguration.<sup>5</sup> We would have had no idea how fervently Jesus’ prayed for the unity of all believers, unless John and the other disciples were praying with Him, and later wrote down His words.<sup>6</sup> John also tells us about Jesus praying aloud before Lazarus’ family and friends in the moments before He raised Lazarus from the dead.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus emphasized that His followers should pray together when He taught “The Lord’s Prayer.” Take a look at the language He uses, and you’ll notice it’s an “us” prayer, not a “me” prayer (“Our Father... give *us* this day our daily bread...”). Moreover, Jesus begins by saying “this, then, is how you *should* pray.”<sup>8</sup> Because the language is plural, the assumption is that His disciples will be praying together. Daniel Henderson, pastor of Grace Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, makes the point well: “The pronoun here is plural, so He is talking about a group—the disciple

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:16, NIV.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9:29, NIV.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:1, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 3:21, 9:28-29, NIV.

<sup>6</sup> John 17, NIV.

<sup>7</sup> John 11:41, NIV.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 6:9, NIV, emphasis mine.

group. In our language it would be ‘when you guys pray’ or ‘when y’all pray’ (in southern dialect). In other words, Jesus says, “When you all pray together as my followers, do it this way....”<sup>9</sup> Jesus clearly *expects* his followers to pray together.

Jesus’ priority on praying with others is shown clearly through the fact that it was what He wanted to do most on His last night on earth. Jesus prayed alone and also entreated others to join Him with the deepest sense of urgency. His convicting words to Peter and the other disciples (when He came back and found them sleeping) are a penetrating reminder of how and why it mattered so much: “*Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? ... Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing but the body is weak.*”<sup>10</sup>

### **What About Praying In Front of Others?**

Still, a question remains. Didn’t Jesus also caution against praying in front of others? Sometimes we may look at Jesus’ encouragement to pray in private and think He’s advising against *any* kind of public prayer: “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”<sup>11</sup>

Take a close look at those words, and you’ll notice that what Jesus is really after is our *motives* when we pray. He starts the passage by cautioning His listeners to “be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them.”<sup>12</sup> What Jesus is against is any kind of disingenuous display of

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<sup>9</sup> Henderson, Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 26:40-41, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 6:6, NIV.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 6:1, NIV.

“righteousness” that is intended to call attention to oneself instead of sincerely seeking God from the heart.

Jesus wants his followers to have the same straightforward, “down to earth” humility and dependence in prayer that He demonstrated. Our prayers and our relationship with God need to be real in private before they can be expressed in public. *But if Jesus had been against praying with others, He would not have done so personally on so many different occasions.*

Andrew Murray, a South African pastor from the 1800s, explains the balance of Jesus’ private and public prayer life: “As a tree has its root hidden in the ground and its stem growing up into the sunlight, so prayer needs secrecy in which the soul meets God alone, *and* it needs public fellowship with those who find their common meeting place in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Trees send down deep roots where no one can see, and draw life and nourishment from the earth. But the most beautiful and productive part of the tree is its leaves, bark and branches, which cannot remain hidden for the tree to survive and thrive.

### **The Helplessness of Jesus**

Jesus demonstrated that the ultimate fulfillment of His purpose in life was found in being *yielded* to God. “The Son can do nothing by himself,” He said, “He can only do what He sees his Father doing.”<sup>14</sup> We don’t tend to think of Jesus’ saying “I’m helpless on my own” or “I can do nothing,” but it was in His humble reliance on the Father that He showed His greatest strength. As God incarnate, Jesus could have

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew Murray, With Christ In The School of Prayer, (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1999), p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> John 5:19, NIV.

been the most independent person who ever lived. Yet His life was marked by a dependence on the Father that stands in stark contrast to the self-reliance so highly regarded by our culture today.

Ole Hallesby, a Norwegian Christian imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II, wrote that “true prayer is a fruit of helplessness and faith. Helplessness becomes prayer the moment that you go to Jesus and speak candidly and confidently with Him about your needs. This is to believe.”<sup>15</sup>

This is the “helplessness” Jesus demonstrated throughout His life on earth. The more the demands for His time and attention, the more He sought the Father’s guidance and strength. In His balanced practice of prayer alone and with others, Jesus established the pattern for every believer to follow.

Daniel Henderson aptly points out that “prayer in its simplest definition is depending on God.” Looking at it from that angle, prayerlessness is our “declaration of independence” from God. When we do not pray, we are saying, ‘Lord, I think I can live the Christian life on my own.’”<sup>16</sup> How different that is from the helplessness of Jesus!

Jesus revealed that we reach the ultimate measure of effectiveness as believers as our lives are given over to Him in moment by moment dependence: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus is clear on the fact that just as He could do nothing apart from the Father, we can do nothing apart from Him. When we are connected to Him and caught up in His purpose, all things are possible. The

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<sup>15</sup> O. Hallesby, Prayer, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Henderson, Fresh Encounters, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> John 15:5, NIV.

success of everything we do as believers depends on it. And when we pray with others, Jesus assures us that He is never far away.

## **The Promise**

Jesus promised that “*where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*”<sup>18</sup> When you really think about it, it’s one of the most compelling promises of the Bible. It’s also one of the most misunderstood.

For years, I interpreted these words to mean that any time a few Christians get together, Jesus will automatically “show up.” As a pastor, I have quoted them at everything from church-league sporting events to worship services I thought should have been better attended. It was a comforting way of expressing the theological truth that God is present in His people (even if enough people didn’t show up!). But that is not what Jesus is saying.

Take a closer look at this verse, and you’ll notice that Jesus is talking about people who are coming together *for the purpose of prayer*. To understand Jesus’ promise correctly, we have to read the verse right before it as well: “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about *anything you ask for*, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. *For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*”<sup>19</sup>

The larger context of these verses is a lesson on how to handle offenses between believers. But the meaning of these words is not limited to that situation alone. Jesus is pointing to a transcendent truth with profound and personal meaning

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<sup>18</sup> Matt.18:20, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> Matt. 18:19-20, NIV, emphasis mine.

for His followers.<sup>20</sup> Something is about to change everything they have ever known about prayer.

Jesus is promising that when they come together *to pray*, *He will be there*. The word for “coming together” in this verse is a root of our English word “synergy,” which may be defined as the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. What happens when Christians genuinely seek God in prayer is more than just the “warm fuzzies” of human togetherness. The Spirit of God is at work in a way that does not happen when we’re on our own, or are gathered together but not directing our attention to God in prayer. When we meet together to reach for God’s will and purposes above our own, Jesus’ presence comes along beside us. He makes Himself known.

Jesus is *always* with believers, whether we are praying or not, just as He has told us He would be.<sup>21</sup> But when we pray *together*, He makes His presence manifest, just as He has promised to. This isn’t something “mystical” or out of reach of the experience of ordinary people (the disciples *were* ordinary people<sup>22</sup>). It’s a truth available to any believer, something that is spiritually discerned.<sup>23</sup> Jesus has promised to be there, and He keeps His promise to those who watch and pray.

Jim Cymbala offers this telling comment about the presence of Jesus in prayer, made by a minister who visited the Brooklyn Tabernacle one Sunday morning: “You can tell how popular a church is by who comes on Sunday morning. “You can tell how popular the pastor or evangelist is by who comes on Sunday night.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Bakke, The Power of Extraordinary Prayer, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 2000), p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 28:20, NIV.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 4:13, NIV.

<sup>23</sup> I Corinthians 2:14, NIV.

“But you can tell how popular Jesus is by who comes to the prayer meeting.”<sup>24</sup>

The discovery of Jesus’ presence has been affirmed for centuries by His people. Evan Roberts, a leader in the powerful 19<sup>th</sup> century revival which swept Wales, resolved in his diary to “remember Thomas,” and “never miss a prayer meeting.”<sup>25</sup> Thomas wasn’t with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them after the resurrection, and missed out on being in His presence. Roberts felt he *had* to be with other believers who were praying, because Jesus’ presence had become so real to him there. Jesus’ manifest presence was a tangible reality that brought deep comfort and a sense of anticipation to Roberts’ faith, and it can do the same for us today.

### **God With Us: Yesterday, Today, Forever**

When we seek Him together from the heart, Jesus demonstrates that He will always be Immanuel, “God with us,” whatever century we may live in.<sup>26</sup> Imagine the impact that could be made on our world today if we took that to heart, and moved forward together in Jesus’ presence and power!

To see the difference praying together in Jesus’ presence makes, we need look no further than the early church. It has been pointed out that “Jesus never taught His disciples to preach, only to pray.”<sup>27</sup> In the pages to come, we’ll discover the reason *why*.

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<sup>24</sup> Jim Cymbala, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Quotation from a lecture by Kevin Adams at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, January 14, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 1:23, NIV.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, *ibid*, p. xxiii.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Catching The Wind**

#### ***Lessons Learned From The Early Church***

We cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from Heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.

G. Campbell Morgan.<sup>1</sup>

Nobody likes to wait. But that is exactly what Jesus told the disciples the day He ascended into heaven: "Do not leave Jerusalem, *but wait* for the gift my Father promised."<sup>2</sup>

Waiting isn't easy. Neither is living apart from Jesus. Imagine how the disciples felt. For three years they had the privilege of being personally close to the humble grandeur of God Incarnate, day and night. John gives us a hint of what this must have been like: "We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."<sup>3</sup> But now He was gone, and they did not know when they would be in His presence again.

We have the gift of "20-20 hindsight." We know what happened next, because the Bible tells us in detail. But the disciples had to live through the days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, and you can imagine how they felt. There were so many questions. "How long will we have to wait?" "When will we be with Jesus again?" "What exactly *was* the gift that the Father promised, and how will we know when it comes?" Even though Jesus had told them, there was much they only recognized after the fact.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, quoted by Stephen F. Olford in Lord, Open The Heavens (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1962), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 1:4, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:14, NIV.

As soon as Jesus was taken up into heaven, the disciples went to the upper room. Imagine them sitting around the same table where they shared the Last Supper. As the memories come flooding back, one by one, they begin to speak...

“Remember when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead?” John asks.

“What about the time He fed that crowd of over five thousand people?” Mark recalls.

“Or when He showed up *alive* on the road to Emmaus, and we didn’t even recognize Him!” Luke adds.

A slow smile crosses Matthew’s face. “Maybe we’re doing it again. Maybe we’re not recognizing Him. *Remember?* Remember what it *was* Jesus told us? ‘*Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*’<sup>4</sup> Maybe Jesus isn’t as far away as we’ve been thinking. He told us to wait, and there’s something we need to do while we’re waiting. If we *pray*, He *will* be *with us!*”

Of course we don’t know if their conversation happened exactly that way, but Luke carefully records how Jesus’ followers spent their time for the next forty days after He ascended into heaven: “They *all* joined together *constantly* in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”<sup>5</sup> We *do know* that prayer was their primary activity as they waited for what God was about to do next.

The disciples prayed because they were doing what Jesus told them to do, and depending on His promises to them. Jesus had told them to wait. Jesus had assured

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 18:20, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 1:14, NIV, emphasis mine.

them, saying “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”<sup>6</sup> It wasn’t long after they began to pray that they saw the promise of His presence fulfilled in the power and person of the Holy Spirit, poured out on the day of Pentecost.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Earliest Act of the Apostles**

The record shows that one of the most consistent “acts” of the apostles and the earliest Christians was to meet together and pray. Their actions displayed a deep conviction that their prayers made a difference. The more they prayed, the more they experienced God’s power and presence in significant ways.

The first believers prayed together with urgency. When they needed comfort after Jesus had left them, they met for prayer.<sup>8</sup> After the Holy Spirit came in power on the Day of Pentecost, Luke tells us that they “*devoted themselves... to prayer.*”<sup>9</sup> They prayed together when choosing a replacement apostle to fill the space that Judas had left.<sup>10</sup> The first miracle in the church occurs as Peter and John are on their way to pray together at the temple.<sup>11</sup> When they’re thrown in prison afterwards, as soon as they’re released, they hold a prayer meeting. “And the place where they were meeting was shaken.”<sup>12</sup>

Prayer is a sign that God’s Spirit is moving among His people. Peter and John prayed together with new believers in Samaria so that they would receive the Holy

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<sup>6</sup> John 14:18, NIV.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:1-4, NIV.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 1:12-14, NIV.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:42, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 1:24, NIV.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 3:1-10, NIV.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 4:23-24, NIV.

Spirit.<sup>13</sup> It has also been said that the cries of prayer are the “growing pains” of the church.<sup>14</sup> As the number of believers increase, in the sixth chapter of Acts the apostles encouraged the early church to choose others to assist with the daily distribution of food for widows, saying “we... will give our attention *to prayer* and the ministry of the word.”<sup>15</sup> Prayer became a priority for them, just as it was for Jesus.

### **Spreading the Sails**

The early church prayed first, and then acted (instead of deciding what they wanted to do and then asking God to bless it). A prayer meeting was the occasion for the sending of the first missionaries: the Holy Spirit directed the early church to send Barnabas and Paul “for the work to which I have called them” after a time of united fasting and prayer.<sup>16</sup> The first worship service in Europe was a prayer meeting that occurred when Paul and his companions were on their way to a “place of prayer” in Macedonia.<sup>17</sup>

Prayer permeated the life of the early church. It was a mark of their growing understanding of the power and presence of God. For the first three hundred years, they had no formal church buildings, no personal Bibles, no multi-media and no sound systems. But they ran to the one Strength they had, and found Him continually faithful. When Peter’s life was in danger after Herod had thrown him in prison, the church had a late-night prayer meeting to intercede for him (and receives a response

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 8:14-17, NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, “A Call To Prayer and Testimony,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 37:123.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 6:1-4, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 13:1-3, NIV.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 16:13-15, NIV.

so immediate and miraculous they have trouble believing it!). Peter's first action when he is set free is to seek out the home of John's mother, "where many people had gathered and were praying."<sup>18</sup> When Paul and Silas are thrown in prison in Philippi, they respond with a midnight prayer meeting (complete with hymns!), and God intervenes with an earthquake.<sup>19</sup>

The early church changed history in a way that the modern church only longs to achieve. Imagine such a small group of people making such a huge difference today! C.H. Spurgeon's reflection on their humble life of praying together gives a poignant and prophetic reminder of the first believers' secret strength: "How could we expect a blessing if we were too idle to ask for it? How could we look for a Pentecost if we never met with one accord, in one place, to wait on the Lord? ... We shall never see much change in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians."<sup>20</sup> No human effort can accomplish what God can do when He is sincerely invited to move in power in the lives of His people. As one modern writer put it wryly, "God looks on the heart, and knows the difference between the lifted sails of prayer and the outboard motor of human method."<sup>21</sup>

### **"The Prayers of Many"**

Beyond Acts, there are still more hints throughout the New Testament of the vital role praying together played for the first generations of Christians. Paul and

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 12:1-17, NIV.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 16:25-28, NIV.

<sup>20</sup> Spurgeon, Only A Prayer Meeting, (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> John Piper, A Godward Life, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1997), p. 234.

Timothy wrote believers in the churches of Colosse “we always thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when *we* pray for you.”<sup>22</sup> Paul, Silas and Timothy wrote the church in Thessalonica, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in *our* prayers.”<sup>23</sup> Paul and his missionary companions prayed together frequently. It was a way they showed affection for other believers, “remembering” them “before God.”<sup>24</sup> They also prayed spontaneously and openly before others. When Paul was on his way to Jerusalem he stopped in Tyre, and Luke writes that “all the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.”<sup>25</sup>

Paul and Timothy credited their very survival to the united prayers of other believers. Writing about a difficulty they faced in “Asia” (what is today Turkey) where they “felt the sentence of death” in their hearts, Paul (and Timothy) wrote that “this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God...”<sup>26</sup> They told the church in Corinth, “...He will continue to deliver us *as you help us by your prayers*. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us *in answer to the prayers of many*.”<sup>27</sup> The lives of the earliest Christian missionaries depended moment by moment on the faithful prayers of others.

Paul’s advice to Timothy shows the priority he placed on prayer for all churches: “I urge, then, *first of all*, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone...”<sup>28</sup> He then adds, “I want men everywhere to lift

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<sup>22</sup> Colossians 1:3, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>23</sup> I Thessalonians 1:2, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>24</sup> I Thessalonians 1:3, NIV.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 21:5, NIV.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:9, NIV.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:10b-11, NIV.

<sup>28</sup> I Timothy 2:1, NIV, emphasis mine.

up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.”<sup>29</sup> The implication here is that men (the Greek word in this instance refers specifically to males) are meeting together to pray. If they were praying alone, there would be no opportunity for “anger or disputing” because there would be no one to fight with!

Men and women together are to give themselves to prayer. When Peter advises husbands to treat their wives with respect so that “nothing will hinder your prayers,” it’s clear from the original language that husbands and wives are praying together, and that it is one of the main purposes of their lives together!<sup>30</sup> Being “devoted” to prayer is also the main reason Paul gives for a husband and wife to mutually abstain from sexual affection for one another.<sup>31</sup> Couples are to give themselves to prayer with the same passion that they are to give themselves to each other.

James also underscores the importance of a life rich in prayer: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him....”<sup>32</sup>

James knew that when we pray together transparently and humbly, God moves in powerful, personal ways: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”<sup>33</sup> When God’s people pray, His presence draws near, and regardless of the outcome of our prayers we are blessed.

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<sup>29</sup> I Timothy 2:8, NIV.

<sup>30</sup> I Peter 3:7, NIV.

<sup>31</sup> I Corinthians 7:5, NIV.

<sup>32</sup> James 5:13-14a, NIV.

<sup>33</sup> James 5:16, NIV.

## God Treasures Prayer

The New Testament reveals that the prayers of believers are treasured by God. The Revelation lifts the curtain of heaven with a beautiful picture of “the prayers of the saints” kept in “golden bowls,” rising like incense before the Father’s throne.<sup>34</sup> It is as if nothing is as pleasing to God as the aroma of the prayers of His people, kept before Him constantly. Incense was precious in the ancient world. Prayer is likewise precious to God; He values it as an expression of the love and need of His people. True prayer is a sign of a yielded heart, an attitude of faith, and a readiness to do His will.

It was prayerfulness that God noted as the difference between “Saul” and “Paul.” When Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, his heart was transformed. He was changed instantly from someone who was “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” into a true believer.<sup>35</sup> When the Lord told Ananias in a vision to visit Saul, Saul’s willingness to pray was the defining characteristic God used to describe the change that had occurred: “Go... for he is praying.”<sup>36</sup>

Samuel Chadwick, in his classic book The Path of Prayer, beautifully describes how God used prayer to transform Saul of Tarsus’ life: “It brought a new assurance of God, a new confirmation of faith, a new fellowship of the people of God, a new experience of healing, a new vocation, a new inheritance, a new power. Prayer

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<sup>34</sup> The Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4, NIV.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 9:1, NIV.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 9:11, NIV.

changes things. Prayer makes all things possible, for it links the praying soul to the omnipotence of God.”<sup>37</sup>

No wonder Paul insisted on praying so much, and told the church to “pray without ceasing!”<sup>38</sup> He had discovered the difference God alone can make when we seek Him on our knees.

### **The Difference God Makes Through United Prayer**

The early church learned through experience that when they went to God together in prayer, come what may, everything that followed was better. Tennyson expressed this truth as few can:

More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of...  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain  
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves, and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.<sup>39</sup>

When Christians humble themselves in prayer, God’s power and presence are released in love, and eternal souls are touched and transformed by His hand. When we spread the sails of prayer to catch the wind that blows from His Spirit, who knows where He will take us?

Wherever He leads, we will be blessed. In the chapter that follows, we’ll consider three gifts God gives to those who meet together to pray.

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel Chadwick, The Path of Prayer, (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2000), p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> I Thessalonians 5:17, NIV.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Idylls of the King (London, England: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 299

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Where Two Or More**

*Gifts God Gives To Those Who Pray*

The more excellent...any benefit is which we stand in need of, the more ready God is to bestow it in answer to prayer.

Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt*<sup>1</sup>

Kevin is a member of our church who had just returned from combat duty with the Marines in Iraq. While there, he sustained an injury to his spinal column. X-rays indicated damage to the “L-5” and “L-6” vertebrae requiring surgery.

I asked Kevin if our church elders could anoint him with oil and lay hands on him in prayer as the New Testament directs. He consented, and we agreed to pray for him the following Sunday.<sup>2</sup>

That Sunday found us outdoors, celebrating our church’s anniversary with a barbecue on our new property. Toward the end of the day, we gathered around Kevin and prepared to pray. It was then I realized I left the oil I was going to use to anoint him at home. It would have taken too long to get it, so still wanting to do everything “just right,” I asked the caterer if he had any.

“No oil,” he answered in a gentle Carolina drawl, “but we do have some grease left over from the barbecue.”

I hesitated for a moment. “That is not even kosher,” I thought. But I had no choice.

“That will have to do!”

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *An Humble Attempt To Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People In Extraordinary Prayer For The Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom On Earth*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> James 5:14, NIV.

We collected the grease, gathered around Kevin, and began to pray.

While we were standing there “anointing” Kevin, I kept thinking, “Lord, we are messing this up. Nowhere in Scripture does it say, ‘anoint the sick with hog fat.’ It will *really* be a miracle if you answer this prayer!”

Puffy cumulous clouds flitted above tall pines as we bowed our heads under an attentive sky. Love and concern for Kevin were felt as warmly as the hands on his shoulders. We asked in faith for God to completely heal him, so that surgery would not be necessary. Though there was no immediate change, we resolved to wait.

Three weeks later I received an email from Kevin, still on duty at a Marine base nearby: *“I do not need surgery, and the problem with my neck and my L-5 and L-6 is gone. The doctors do not know what to make of it. Praise God!”*

In worship two Sundays later, Kevin shared what had happened. He explained that shortly after we prayed for him, his pain had subsided. He went in for a second set of x-rays in preparation for surgery. Once they were examined, damage to the vertebrae was no longer evident. “I feel better than new,” Kevin told his befuddled doctor. “The Great Physician healed me.”

Grease or no grease, God had done a miracle.

Miracles may not happen every time we pray. Just as Paul prayed without success for his “thorn in the flesh” to be removed, there have been many times we asked for a healings that didn’t occur.<sup>3</sup> But that should never stop us from asking.

There are blessings that will only come through our prayers together. Our Heavenly Father calls us come to Him just as we are, because He loves us and has our best interests at heart. Jesus summed it up this way: “Which of you fathers, if your

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<sup>3</sup>2 Corinthians 12:7-8

son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”<sup>4</sup>

God’s gifts for people who pray together are too precious to miss. For the remainder of this chapter, we will consider three of them (there are many more!): the gift of God’s Spirit, the gift of changed hearts, and the gift of a maturing faith.

### **The Gift of God’s Spirit**

God is looking for people who will call on Him humbly from the heart, even if their faith is small and they do not “have their act together.” God told Israel in 2 Chronicles, “if my *people*, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”<sup>5</sup> The power of united prayer is not in the strength of numbers or the amount of faith of those praying. The real power of prayer is the unstoppable love of God for those who are calling on Him, even if their faith is limited. If faith as small as a single “mustard seed” can move a mountain, imagine the power that can be released when even a few are gathered together in the Father’s hand.<sup>6</sup>

That is exactly what happened at the Dutch Reformed Church in Lower Manhattan in July of 1857. The church had been declining as its membership moved away to another part of the city. In desperation, the church called Jeremiah Lanphier,

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:11-13, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 17:20, NIV.

a layman, to be a “city missionary” and reach out to those in the surrounding neighborhood.

Lanphier’s solution to the problem was to pray. He organized a prayer meeting for an hour at noon on Wednesdays, and distributed fliers announcing it in advance in the neighborhood and business area surrounding the church. When the time for the meeting came, no one showed up for the first half-hour. By the time the meeting was over, only six men had gathered to pray.

Lanphier and the men did not give up, and the numbers began to increase in the weeks that followed. Other churches began to pray together as they noticed that God was blessing the meetings, and larger locations for meeting together had to be found. J. Edwin Orr describes the amazing move of God that happened next:

Within six months, ten thousand business men were gathering daily for prayer in New York. Within two years, a million converts were added to the American churches. No part of the nation remained untouched by fervent prayer. Not only was the population of the United States involved, but within a year or so the people of the United Kingdom—Ulster (Ireland), Scotland, Wales and England—were moved by an awakening as extensive and lasting as the Evangelical Revival of Wesley’s day.<sup>7</sup>

This “prayer meeting revival” was a sovereign work of God. It was not the result of dynamic preaching, clever marketing or popular personalities. God simply responded as His people called on Him and sought Him above all else. God not only blessed a church in response to the prayers of a few, He blessed a nation.

Revivals may not happen every time a few Christians get together to pray. But God will give His Spirit to those who ask, just as He has promised. And where His Spirit is, anything is possible. Like Mary who spent time at Jesus’ feet, the church that chooses to be in God’s presence through united prayer chooses “what is

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<sup>7</sup> J. Edwin Orr, The Fervent Prayer, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 5-6, parenthesis mine.

better.”<sup>8</sup> Blessings always follow united prayer. It may not always be the specific blessing we have in mind, but it will be uniquely and purposefully selected by God, who in all things “works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”<sup>9</sup> We may meet to pray to revive a church (as Jeremiah Lanphier intended), and find that God revives a nation instead! It has been said that, “If the Lord does not pay in silver, He will pay in gold, and if He does not pay in gold, He will pay in diamonds.”<sup>10</sup> God will give the perfect gift in response to our prayers, pouring out His power through the generous hand of His omnipotent love.

### **The Gift of Changed Hearts**

God’s love is poured out in unique ways when we unite in prayer. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit.<sup>11</sup> God longs for us to pray together because He wants to affirm His love and power among us in ways that will bring Him glory. There is no greater glory that can be given to God than that of a changed and repentant human heart.

When believers join together in prayer, God’s love is concentrated in that place because of the amount of love He has for each person present. When you pray with others, you and those around you become a focal point of God’s love and power.<sup>12</sup> Where Jesus is present in His Spirit, love is always close at hand, working in ways visible and invisible.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 10:42, NIV.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:28, NIV.

<sup>10</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Morning and Evening, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 281.

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 5:22, NIV.

<sup>12</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, “Prayer Meetings,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 60:526.

That is why praying together provides a unique opportunity for believers to grow in their ability to love God and love each other. Scripture is full of examples of God's people expressing His love among themselves through their prayers. In a tender moment in the book of Acts, as Paul said farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus, "*he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him.*"<sup>13</sup> There was nothing better they could do for one another than to entrust each other to God through their prayers. Samuel once told the people of Israel, "far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you."<sup>14</sup> Paul again expressed his affection by his prayers when he wrote the church in Thessalonica: "night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again...."<sup>15</sup> God's Word shows us that if we love one another sincerely and genuinely, we pray for each other.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus continues to show His love for us in heaven by interceding for us daily.<sup>16</sup> His example calls us to intercede energetically and compassionately for each other as well. Some of the closest times Christians can share are when they are before God together in prayer. When we hear others praying for us with God-given tenderness and insight, it draws us closer to Him and to each other as His unconditional love is poured into our hearts.

In the same way, when churches are having difficulty getting along with each other, praying together can accomplish a great deal. Charles Finney, one of the most influential evangelists from the 1800s, observed that,

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 20:36-37, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>14</sup> I Samuel 12:23, NIV.

<sup>15</sup> I Thessalonians 3:10, NIV.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 8:34, NIV.

Nothing tends more to cement the hearts of Christians than praying together. Never do they love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other's hearts in prayer. Their spirituality begets a feeling of union and confidence, highly important to the prosperity of the Church. It is doubtful whether Christians can ever be otherwise than united, if they are in the habit of really praying together. And where they have had hard feelings and differences among themselves, these are all done away by uniting in prayer.<sup>17</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was put to death in a concentration camp by the Nazis during World War II, pointed out that praying with others encourages new maturity in us, because it lifts us above our “personal concerns” and allows us to pray “selflessly.”<sup>18</sup> It pulls us up out of an unhealthy self-focus, and gently restores us to our larger place in the body of Christ as we sense the needs of others and are drawn to love them through our prayers. Bonhoeffer called this an “incalculably great gift” of God’s grace “for every Christian community and for every Christian.”<sup>19</sup>

It is hard to be mad at someone when you are praying in the right spirit, mindful that the same Lord who has forgiven your sins is listening. Praying together is one of the ways the unity that Jesus prayed for naturally occurs as the Spirit convicts us, changes our hearts, and draws us together. As Bonhoeffer put it, “I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that... may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died,

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Finney, Lectures On Revival, 8:1, posted on the Christian Classics Ethereal Library ([www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)), 13 May 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together. (San Francisco, California: Harper and Row Publishers, 1954), p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

the face of a forgiven sinner. This is a happy discovery for the Christian who begins to pray for others.”<sup>20</sup>

The city I live in (Durham, North Carolina) has been marked with racial discord for generations. For seven years, I have met weekly with a multi-racial group of ministers who have committed to plead with God to bring revival to our city. Though we come from a number of churches with widely different backgrounds and cultures, God has begun to work a unity among us that is unique in our city. We all share the same Savior, the conviction of the authority of His Word, and a deep desire for others to come to Him and be saved. Because we are only human, we naturally have our differences at times. But we have learned that when we seek God honestly together in prayer, it is impossible to remain at odds for long. The Holy Spirit begins to work on us, and convict us of anything that separates us from God or one another. Jesus’ love softens our rough edges, and our imperfections are placed in perspective at the foot of His cross. We have found that no matter what our differences may be, Christians who “pray together stay together,” and God blesses us with deeper love for each other as a result. The bond that I share with these believers is precious to me. God has made us into a group that looks and feels a little more like heaven.

### **The Gift of A Maturing Faith**

When we pray with others, we also learn by example. We benefit from the maturing work of the Holy Spirit in others’ lives. One of my first experiences of God working in this way was with a prayer group I participated in when first out of seminary. Ann Wang was an older, first-generation Chinese believer who had a

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

contagious gratitude to God. Every time she prayed, she would begin her prayers by whispering with a barely discernible accent, “Thank you, Father.” She would repeat her thanks again and again, as she poured out the love in her heart for God and all He had done for her. Years later, I can still hear her voice. Her example comes to mind frequently when I sit down with others to pray, and reminds me to thank God for all He has done for me. It was a lesson in gratitude I will never forget. Without knowing it, Ann was teaching us how to pray in a beautiful way that would bless us for the rest of our lives.

John Hyde was a missionary to India in the early 1900s. He was so dedicated to spending time in prayer that he is better known by his nickname, “Praying Hyde.” Hyde had a burden for others to know Jesus, and spent hours a day in prayer. One of the missionaries who prayed with him wrote, “I owe to him more than I owe to any other man, for showing me what a prayer life is, and for showing me what a real *consecrated* life is. I shall ever praise God for bringing me into contact with him... Jesus Christ became an ideal to me, and I had a glimpse of His prayer life, and I had a longing, which remains to this day, to be a real praying man.”<sup>21</sup>

Praying with mature believers enables us to see Jesus in them, and helps us want to be closer to Him. When John Wesley was traveling to Georgia as a young missionary in 1735, his ship was damaged and nearly overturned in a violent storm. A number of Moravian believers were also on the ship, and Wesley had been drawn to them and observing them while on the voyage. Eight years earlier, God’s Spirit had moved powerfully among the Moravian community in Germany, igniting a

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<sup>21</sup> Francis A. McGaw, quoted by Captain E.G. Carre, Editor, Praying Hyde (Gainesville, Florida: Bridge-Logos Press, 1982), p. 54.

round-the-clock prayer watch that would last for over a hundred years and lead to one of the earliest and greatest missionary movements in Protestant history.<sup>22</sup>

As the storm raged, Wesley watched the Moravians as they continued uninterrupted in worship and prayer. Wesley became convicted by his own lack of faith, and recorded the incident in his journal:

...The sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied mildly, "No; our women and children were not afraid to die." ...This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.<sup>23</sup>

The Moravians' faithfulness in prayer made a huge impact on Wesley's life. Many believe the revival that occurred in England under Wesley would not have taken place if the Moravians had not been convicted to pray fervently a decade before. As He had done so many times before, God impacted history disproportionately through the prayers of a small group of believers gathered in Jesus' name.

When we commit ourselves to praying together faithfully, we see God's hand move in ways that never would have occurred otherwise. If we do not pray, we will not know what could have happened through God's power to answer prayer, and the blessings we have missed. Jesus' words to the disciples after they had tried unsuccessfully to cast out a demon make this clear: "this kind can only come out by prayer."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Leslie K. Tarr, "The Prayer Meeting That Lasted 100 Years," *Christian History*, Volume 1, Number 1, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> John Wesley, quoted in "The Moravians and John Wesley," *Christian History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Mark 9:29, NIV.

When we go through life without praying with others, we are a little like Don Quixote, charging at windmills on our own. No matter how valiant the effort and vital our individual prayers are, the challenges we face are too great to go at alone. Throughout His Word God encourages us toward a life of prayer that joins both heart with Him and hands with others. Through our prayers together, God lifts our eyes to new vistas of what He alone can do. In the pages that follow, we will explore that horizon, and discover how to give prayer the priority it deserves.

## **Chapter Six:**

**“Lord, Bend Me!”**

***Making Prayer Priority One***

It turns ordinary mortals into men of power... It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God. There is no power like that of prevailing prayer.

Samuel Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer*<sup>1</sup>

His name was Floyd King, but we called him “The Wizard of Ahs.” It wasn’t a nice name, and he didn’t deserve it.

Pastor King had come out of retirement to shepherd The Nazarene Church in the sleepy desert town of Holtville, California. I was thirteen when I first met him. My older brothers and I would sit in the fourth pew from the front, counting the number of times Pastor King would hesitate and say “ah” between points in his sermon. Like Joseph’s brothers, we meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

It made us pay attention. And as we watched and listened, we were able to observe a true believer in the twilight of his life. It would change me forever.

Not long after Pastor King’s arrival, my father was hospitalized for major surgery. Pastor King would travel over 25 miles every day to call on Dad, and to pray for him. He even gave Dad a shave. After that, my brothers and I dared not breathe a word about “The Wizard of Ahs.” Dad wouldn’t have it.

When I began to question my faith a year later, Pastor King was there again, patiently listening to my doubts. He and his wife quietly made themselves available. That summer I wore a path to their door and always found it open, even if I hadn’t called. They took the time to just be there, and always found a way to sneak in a time of prayer together.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer*. (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: CLC Publications), 2000: p. 90.

One evening as I sat on my bike outside their home saying goodbye, Pastor King remarked, “We think God may be calling you to be a pastor someday.”

He was right. But it would take me more than six years to accept what he had seen so clearly. God, in His providence and humor, had given “The Wizard of Ahs” a place of honor in my life.

Pastor King didn’t talk much about praying with others. He simply did it. He balanced prayer with action in a quiet way that God used to transform lives. Even mine.

### **When Do You Pray, and When Do You *Do Something*?**

How do you know when to pray, and when to put feet to your prayers? James tells us that faith, if not accompanied by action, is “dead.”<sup>2</sup> When do you pray, and when do you act?

A close friend of mine struggled with those questions in a heart-rending way. John loves the Lord and has served Him as a pastor for years. Like many pastors’ children, his daughter began to wonder what she was missing outside of the faith she had been raised with all of her life. Though John and his wife Sally did their best, it was not long before she was lured away by the wrong crowd.

I will never forget the urgency in Sally’s voice when she called me one afternoon after school. “She’s *gone*,” she said, choking back tears. “Jenny is *gone*.”

“*What happened?*” I asked. “Where did she go?”

“We were making her stay home, because she had snuck out two nights ago,” Sally said. “We were trying to keep her away from her friends and off of marijuana.”

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<sup>2</sup> James 2:16, NIV.

She had two weeks left to go, and we had arranged with the high school for a stay-at-home tutor so she could finish out her sophomore year. Jenny grabbed the first chance she had. She *took off*. I was on the phone in the kitchen, and a moment later she was out the door, running down the street. Before I could catch her, a friend picked her up, and we have not seen her since.”

What followed was every parent’s nightmare. Day after day, night after night, Jenny was away from home. John and Sally had no idea where she was. In the weeks that followed, they scoured the city looking for their daughter. The police and sheriff’s departments were notified, reports were filed, and after several days, Jenny’s name and picture were circulated to law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Members of their church joined in search, sending Jenny’s name out on prayer chains and even lending their cars so John and Sally would not be recognized when they watched a place when they were following up a tip on where Jenny might be staying.

There were frequent rumors of Jenny’s whereabouts and a couple of sightings on surveillance videos in places she was known to frequent, but John and Sally were always a day behind her. They were out late at night and up early into the morning, following every clue they could find. They even thought they saw her on two occasions, only to discover it was a girl who looked like Jenny.

The worry, wear and tear took their toll. Jenny was their only daughter, but they also had a teenage son at home who needed their attention. “Sally is like a mother bear,” John told me. “She is so consumed with finding Jenny that she is close to the edge. The other day, she went into a drug dealer’s house *alone*, trying to find

out anything she could about Jenny. I try to tell her that we need to be less frantic and spend more time praying and fasting, but she simply says ‘I pray while I am looking.’”

“But how can you know *where* to look if you do not pray about it first?” I asked.

“That is precisely how I see it,” John replied. “I have noticed that our best leads come after we stop running around everywhere, quiet ourselves, and really seek the Lord. That is when people start calling and tell us that they have seen her.”

“Still, that does not sound very easy,” I said.

“It is not,” John replied. “She has been gone three weeks now. I want to be out there looking for her with every fiber of my being. It seems like we are always just a step behind her, and that makes it even more frustrating. One night I learned she had been a passenger in a friend’s car when it flipped three times. She was injured, and fled the scene. The other night, one of our son’s friends saw her at a convenience store. We discovered she was in the company of another girl who has been a runaway for months and a boy with a criminal record. They were inquiring about bus tickets out of town. So I did what I could. I followed the leads I had, distributing fliers to every bus terminal in the area. I sat outside the bus station and waited. But there was only so much I could do. And I began to realize, God knows where she is, and He can help us find her better than anyone else.”

That’s how it happened. One Sunday afternoon a few days later, John and Sally had taken a step back from their search. They relaxed with their son that afternoon, and spent more time in prayer. “That evening,” John told me later, “I

wanted to take Sally out to dinner in a nearby town. But when we got there, we discovered the restaurant was closed. So we headed home. We had just pulled into the parking lot of a place on Main and were still in the car when my phone rang. It was a waitress at a restaurant two blocks away. *Jenny was there*. Within two minutes, we were standing in front of her.”

### **Walking At God’s Pace: Watching and Praying**

John and Sally’s time in the crucible taught them a life-lesson in prayer. Prayer must precede action. We must learn to wait if we want to live in a way that is effectively directed by God. Everything in our old sin nature will rebel against this, but we must learn how to walk at God’s pace if we desire to truly hear God and discern His best for our lives. As Ben Patterson points out,

For many of us, on an almost subconscious level, there is a lack of confidence that something like prayer can actually get anything done. Therefore, since our lives are full of things that need to be done, prayer naturally gets pushed out to the edges of the day... God said it would be that way: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses. Therefore you will flee!’ (Isaiah 30:15-16). Flight is a good image of the kind of activity that dominates prayerless people and churches.<sup>3</sup>

Walking at God’s pace does not exclude action. We act on what God gives us, and go no further. Watching and praying is rarely easy, especially in a crisis when we feel like we have to do *something*. But it is precisely what Jesus told the disciples to do in the Garden of Gethsamene the night before He was crucified:

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Patterson, “Whatever Happened To the Prayer Meeting?” Article posted on *LeadershipJournal.net*, July 4, 2006.

“Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”<sup>4</sup>

When we watch and pray, we learn to be sensitive to the Spirit and move with the leading of God’s grace. We act on what God gives us, and do no more. Then we wait again. C.H. Spurgeon, arguably one of the “busiest” pastors in history given the weight of his workload and his personal challenges (frequently bedridden with arthritis, he pastored a church of over 5,000 members while directing a popular Bible school and an orphanage), gives a practical explanation of what this looks like in the Christian’s day-to-day life:

We shall not fly into a passion with the Lord, and refuse to believe Him any more, neither shall we run off to novelties, and fall into the fads and crazes of the day, to try this and to try that, because God’s own way is a failure; but we shall say, I have done what God bade me. I have done it in dependence upon His Spirit, and I believe good will come of it; therefore I shall wait and watch. I shall be found moving when God moves; or sitting still when the Lord tarries; but I am sure that He will not fail the soul that waits upon Him; all will be well; the blessing will come. What a sweet thing is the calm leisure of faith!<sup>5</sup>

When we watch and pray, God is able to bring rest to the hectic rhythms of our lives, so that even in difficult and busy times, we are garrisoned by His strength. This is what Paul is describing to the Philippians when he writes, “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:41, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon, “Renewing Strength,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 29:897.

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 4:5-7, NIV.

## Why Prayer IS Action

Nehemiah provides an example of the rhythm of prayer and action in the middle of a challenging time. While exiled with the Jewish people in Babylon, he hears that the wall of Jerusalem is in ruins. His immediate response is to fast and pray.<sup>7</sup> God then gives him direction through the personal interest and response of the Babylonian King Artaxerxes. All the while, Nehemiah is praying.<sup>8</sup> As he begins to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem, he encounters opposition from Israel's enemies. Nehemiah immediately gathers the exiles who have returned with him to pray.<sup>9</sup> God then directs them to divide the people into those who will work on the wall, and those who will guard them.<sup>10</sup> Action follows prayer. Prayer leads to action.

Just as God's Word reminds us that "faith without deeds is dead," prayer and action are never intended to be exclusive of each other.<sup>11</sup> In the busyness of the world around us, we sometimes end up making them that way, and end up living disconnected from the one real Source of peace, direction and power. The Danish philosopher and believer Soren Kierkegaard noted that "the best help in all action is to pray; that is true genius; then one never goes wrong."<sup>12</sup> The best kind of action begins with prayer, and remains prayerful throughout. Prayer must permeate our actions by being a continual part of them as we consciously live in God's presence.

When we remember that prayer not only should precede action, but actually *is* action of the highest kind because it includes Him in all we do, we give God the

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<sup>7</sup> Nehemiah 1:4, NIV.

<sup>8</sup> Nehemiah 2:1-6, NIV.

<sup>9</sup> Nehemiah 4:8-9, NIV.

<sup>10</sup> Nehemiah 4:16, NIV.

<sup>11</sup> James 2:26, NIV.

<sup>12</sup> Soren Kierkegaard quoted in Donald G. Bloesch, The Struggle of Prayer (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Helmers and Howard Publishers, 1988), p. 131.

priority He deserves in our lives and work. Because we are so easily distracted, we must fight to keep this perspective continually. This is the practical meaning of praying “without ceasing.”<sup>13</sup> It is not just a matter of “making time” for God, it is the realization that all of our time is in His hands, and we are constantly before Him wherever we are and whatever we do.

The understanding that we must give prayer the priority in all we do takes time to grow in our lives. It rarely happens immediately because we are so used to living another way. We may have to unlearn old habits and patterns of thought, but we should not be discouraged in the effort, because it is part of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus. At the beginning of the Welsh Revival, Evan Roberts prayed “Oh Lord, bend me!”<sup>14</sup> Roberts was trained as a blacksmith, and undoubtedly had a mental image of metal being forged by a hammer on an anvil as he prayed. If you have ever seen that done, you know it takes patience. But as the work is completed, it becomes strong and lasting. The same is true of learning to pray. God bends us in a new direction, but it is the direction we were meant to grow in all along.

### **Finding The Balance**

God desires us to be prayerful people of action: people who pray first, and then act in response to His leading. All of us are at varying degrees of keeping this balance. Sometimes we may tell ourselves, “I am not much of a praying person.” But *Jesus was*, and as His followers, you and I are intended to become like Him.

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<sup>13</sup> I Thessalonians 5:17, KJV.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Adams, A Diary of Revival, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2004), p. 60.

Jesus was also a man of action. Churches seem to have people who are “all or nothing” on either side of the prayer and action continuum. There are those who attend every opportunity to worship and pray, but will not show up when it is time to break a sweat. There are also those who will show up every time there is work to be done, but will not darken the door of a prayer meeting. Both groups can be tempted to judge each other, and feel their faith is “better.” But both are missing something. In reality, prayer and action are two sides of the *same coin* of a mature and Christ-like faith. You cannot have one without the other. Neither can be excluded if we are to be like Jesus. They must simply be kept in the right balance of prayer, then response to God’s direction through our actions. Action without prayer, even if it is done for God, misses the mark. E.M. Bounds describes this dynamic:

Sacred work—church activities—may so engage and absorb us as to hinder praying, and when this is the case, evil results always follow. It is better to let the work go by default than to let the praying go by neglect. Whatever affects the intensity of our praying affects the value of our work. ‘Too busy to pray’ is not only the keynote to backsliding, but it mars even the work done. Nothing is well done without prayer for the simple reason that it leaves God out of the account. It is so easy to be seduced by the good to the neglect of the best....<sup>15</sup>

When actions are carried out in response to God’s leading through prayer, we become His agents of light and salt in a dark and tasteless world. We are able to work effectively and with conviction, because we are no longer acting on our own agenda, but with His wisdom and Spirit moving through us.

A missionary to India during the early 1900s learned this balance in a beautiful way. She had been frustrated by a lack of results in her work. She then

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<sup>15</sup> Edward McKendree Bounds, The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds On Prayer, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 371.

decided that instead of asking God to bless what she was already doing, she would give prayer a new priority in her ministry. This was not easy at first, because she was continually thinking of things that she could be doing as she started each morning on her knees. She often felt guilty, as if she was not working hard enough. But soon she discovered that her prayer *was* work, because it required a special effort of a different kind than she had ever known before. As a result, *all of her work* thrived and bore fruit in a way she could not have anticipated a year earlier. She later wrote a friend, “Every department of the work now is in a more prosperous condition than I have ever known it to be. The stress and strain have gone out of my life. The joy of feeling that my life is easily balanced, the life of communion on the one hand and the life of work on the other, brings constant rest and peace. I could not go back to the old life, and God grant that it may always be impossible.”<sup>16</sup>

This is the work that changes the world, because it is ultimately not our own, but God’s. This is true Kingdom work, driven by the Spirit, achieving His agenda and not our own. As we give ourselves to God by giving prayer the first priority in all of our work, we may feel like we have our hands on the wheel because it takes our undivided attention. In reality, we are sitting on our Father’s lap, and He will steer us in the direction we need to go.

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<sup>16</sup> Francis A. McGaw, quoted by Captain E.G. Carre, Editor: Praying Hyde, (Gainesville, Florida: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1982), pp. 38-40.

## **Chapter Seven:**

### **The Teamwork of Prayer**

*Practical Ways to Pray Together*

The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

Samuel Chadwick<sup>1</sup>

Are you a Mary or a Martha?

Most of us are a little of both.

Let me explain. Luke gives us this description of Mary and Martha in the tenth chapter of his Gospel:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."<sup>2</sup>

Martha was busy doing things for Jesus, and had the best of intentions. The things she was doing were kind and helpful. Guests needed to be taken care of. Dinner required preparation. Needs had to be met. But with everything she had to do, Martha lost her focus. Even though she started out with Jesus in mind, she got too busy, and things got out of hand. She not only began to look critically in her sister's direction, she rebuked Jesus as well. No wonder He said she was "worried and upset about many things!"

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Chadwick, quoted in "The Church Prayer Meeting, Its Decline and Revival," by G. Chewter. Article posted on The Banner of Truth website, [banneroftruth.org](http://banneroftruth.org), July 22, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:38-42, NIV.

I wonder what would have happened if Martha had taken a break from her work and sat down for a moment. Jesus had fed over five thousand before, and Martha *knew* that. What if she had asked Him to help with the few who were gathered in her home? Jesus could have prepared a meal in a moment. That would have been a dinner to remember!

Still, I do not want to be too hard on Martha. No one likes to do all the work while everyone else just sits around. From Martha's point of view, that is what seemed to be happening. But there is something that Martha was missing.

Mary was not just sitting there. She was *listening*, actively engaged in Jesus' every word. Her eyes and ears were wide open, as she watched and waited for what He would say next. Mary was showing her devotion to Jesus by savoring His presence, and that is why she chose "what is better."

It is not that Martha's work did not matter. It was done out of love for Jesus as well, and He understood that. Terry Teykl offers this explanation of Jesus' words: "Jesus was not saying that Martha's work was not important, nor was He condemning Martha for attending to the meal. Instead He was *commending* Mary for her choice to sit at His feet and fellowship with Him."<sup>3</sup> What Martha was doing was good. But what Mary chose was even better.

### **Bringing Martha Along**

If you are like me, you find yourself wrestling between being a little like Mary, and a little like Martha. You want to spend time at Jesus' feet in prayer, but you also often find yourself busy wanting to *do something*. And it is then you

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<sup>3</sup> Terry Teykl, The Presence Based Church, (Muncie, Indiana: Prayer Point Press, 2003), p. 18.

wonder, “With so many needs in the world around us, is it right to sit there and pray?”

Jesus seemed to think so. That is why He said that what Mary chose “will not be taken away from her.” Jesus *defended* the importance of extended time before Him. As we saw in the previous chapter, work done without prayer is never as effective as work done after first seeking Him from the heart.

Jesus knew that prayer *is* work. He prayed so hard in the Garden of Gethsemane that He sweat blood.<sup>4</sup> Prayer requires commitment and effort. It takes time that could be used for other things. Like Mary, when you pray, you have to decide between what is good and what is better. Choices have to be made, and that is not always easy. And what is worse, it might not make the Marthas in your life very happy.

But what if there were a way to bring Martha along? Prayer is the tool God uses to lay the foundation for the greatest good in our lives. From our salvation on, the best things in our lives begin with prayer. “Our prayers,” Ole Hallesby wrote, “are always a result of Jesus’ knocking at our hearts’ doors.”<sup>5</sup> We need to understand that praying together is one of the most practical things we can do because it sets God’s power in motion. The Bible reminds us that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”<sup>6</sup> If we want to see real change happen, we cannot do it on our own. We have to pray. And once Martha understands that, she might pull up a chair and bow her head.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 22:44, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> Ole Hallesby, *Prayer* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1994), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 6:12, NIV.

Martha wants to get things done, and her matter-of-factness makes prayer exciting. When you come to God in faith expecting something to happen, something inevitably will! That is why Mary and Martha need each other. Martha needs Mary's heartfelt savoring of Jesus' presence, and Mary needs Martha's desire to make a difference in the world.

Because churches today contain both Marys and Marthas, the pages that follow offer suggestions about how they can pray *together*. Many of them are ideas Martha will like because they are practical (you might think of it as something of a "cookbook" for prayer), and Mary will like them because they help make the most of the time at Jesus' feet. There are concepts that will help you get people praying together for the first time, or breathe new life into an existing prayer group. There are both time-tested and also contemporary ideas for praying in groups of all sizes, as well as encouragement for how to unite your church as a whole for prayer.

The pathway to praying together may be less traveled and even uphill at times, but it is straightforward and simple, and those who have gone before us have left signposts along the way. Blessings await us as we take it together.

### **Laying A Foundation of Love**

Jesus' promise that He will be present when two or three gather in His name makes our prayers incredible potential. As we saw in chapter four, God moved powerfully when only a handful of believers prayed in the early church. God does not "despise the day of small things."<sup>7</sup> Simply because a prayer group is small, it does not mean that God will not do great things in response. We are culturally

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<sup>7</sup> Zechariah 4:6-10, NIV.

conditioned to think that “bigger is better.” Instead of looking at numbers, we must focus our attention first on God and His faithfulness to answer prayer.

C.H. Spurgeon believed so strongly in the response of God to united prayer that during an illness and long absence from the pulpit (in 1879), he instructed his congregation, “*above all, keep up the prayer meetings.*”<sup>8</sup> The prayer meetings at the church he served (The Metropolitan Tabernacle in London) were regularly attended by a thousand to twelve hundred people. He not only knew how to “grow” a prayer meeting, he was experienced in dealing with every practical aspect of keeping them going.<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon offered this helpful advice to pastors who wanted to inspire others to pray together:

Be much in prayer yourself, and this will be more effectual than scolding your people for not praying. Set the example. Draw streams of prayer out of the really gracious people by getting them to pray whenever they come to see you, and by praying with them yourself whenever you call upon them. Not only when they are ill, but when they are well, ask them to join in prayer with you.<sup>10</sup>

The best way to encourage others to pray is by loving them prayerfully. Pray with them spontaneously as God gives the opportunity. Serve them by praying for them. If they sense their needs and concerns genuinely matter to you, they will be drawn to pray with you. People do not want to be pressured, but they will feel naturally and winsomely invited if they hear others lovingly and sincerely interceding for them. Laying guilt trips does not work.

If you want to begin a work of prayer, you must begin by praying. No amount of planning or organizing can substitute for the groundwork God will do through your

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<sup>8</sup> Spurgeon, “The Empty Seat,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 25:54.

<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon, Only A Prayer Meeting, (Geanies House, Fearn and Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publishing, 2000), p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon, An All Around Ministry, in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, p. 231.

prayers. *Bless others with your prayers.* Daniel Henderson gives this encouragement to lay people wanting to share a vision for prayer with their pastors: “You cannot coerce the pastor into a burden for prayer ministry. However, a gracious invitation to “stop in sometime” would be fitting. As he sees the vibrancy, love and support of praying saints, he will be... attracted to the excitement and possibility of prayer. Honey always works better than vinegar.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Starting the Orchestra**

Many people do not feel comfortable praying in front of others. That lack of confidence can be one of the greatest challenges to starting a prayer group or encouraging an existing one to grow. People can be intimidated by those for whom words come easily, and feel that if they cannot pray “well” aloud, it is better not to say anything, or even to not show up at all.

Henry Ward Beecher, a pastor and proponent of prayer during the mid-1800s (and the brother of Harriet Beecher-Stowe) offers this helpful insight for those who feel awkward about praying aloud: “the first hesitating, stumbling, and ungrammatical prayer of a confused Christian may be worth more to the church than the best prayer of the most eloquent pastor.”<sup>12</sup> People who are not comfortable praying with others should be encouraged to know how much their prayers matter, and every effort they make should be championed. Think of your prayer group as an orchestra (remember, the word that Jesus uses for praying “in agreement” is the

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Henderson, *Fresh Encounters*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2004), p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Ward Beecher, quoted by C.H. Spurgeon, *Only A Prayer Meeting*, (Geanies House, Fern, and Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), pp. 19-21.

source of our word “symphony”).<sup>13</sup> There are many instruments with many different voices, and they all have their part to play.

Bruce is a member of our church who is shy to speak in front of others. His sentences are short and his words are to the point (Martha would like him—he is a practical man!). When Bruce was ordained as an elder, he suddenly found himself in a group of people who were comfortable praying together. Though I knew he had a faithful prayer life, in the years I had known him, I had never heard him pray aloud in the presence of others before. To encourage him, whenever our elders would pray together, I would gently remind them how important each of their prayers were, even if they were offered in silence. I made a point of praying for Bruce on my own, asking God to give him the confidence he needed to express himself aloud in prayer. I also encouraged the members of our church to understand that their prayers can make a huge difference even though they feel they cannot “get the words right.” After all, God does not look on our words, but on our hearts.

I waited for over a year, but the first time I heard Bruce pray, it took my breath away. His prayer was brief, but so obviously from the heart I was deeply moved, and immediately sensed God’s Spirit at work. Today, Bruce prays aloud regularly. His sentences are still short and to the point, but that makes them that much more of a blessing! His plain-spoken praying serves as a helpful reminder of Jesus’ advice that God does not hear us because of “many words.”<sup>14</sup>

The body of Christ is blessed and built up when all of its members join together to pray. Everyone is welcome, and should be encouraged to lend their voices

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew 18:19, NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 6:7, NIV.

to praying together. Their prayers are precious to God, even when they feel they are “not good” at praying! Encourage them to “approach the throne of grace with confidence!”<sup>15</sup>

### **A Simple Prayer Meeting From Start to Finish**

Just as Jesus withdrew his disciples to a quiet place and Paul met his companions outside of Philippi to pray, the space where you meet to pray should be as free as possible from distractions, so you can pray without interruption.<sup>16</sup> You are entering into the Lord’s presence there in a special way, and it is holy ground. Spend time preparing your spirit before you come, and if you are the first to arrive, welcome the Lord by praying over the place where you will meet. Quietly confess any known sin in your life to Him, because the Bible tells us that if we cherish sin in our hearts, the Lord will not listen to our prayers.<sup>17</sup> Ask God to help you love others and be “in one accord” as you pray with them, and invite the Holy Spirit to fill you and direct you as you pray.

A simple prayer meeting usually begins with a Scripture reading and brief singing, leading into a time of praise and adoration. You are entering “His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.”<sup>18</sup> Any themes for your time together or special needs can be mentioned in the opening moments of the meeting, but all should be encouraged to enter into God’s presence without delay, and allow as much time for prayer as possible. Many groups limit their time and power in prayer by spending too

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<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 4:16, NIV.

<sup>16</sup> Mark 3:7, Acts 16:13, NIV.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 66:18, NIV.

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 100:4, NIV.

much time in conversation before praying. Setting a time limit for conversation and keeping it faithfully will go a long way toward remedying the problem.

When the praying begins, all should be encouraged to keep their prayers brief, so that everyone is given the opportunity to join in. Prayer that is “conversational,” where all pray short and frequent prayers, is helpful for keeping everyone’s attention throughout the meeting. Whenever people have gathered to pray, one of the greatest distractions has been those who monopolize the time. Spurgeon advised against lengthy prayers as “the ruin of all fervency, which must be exterminated by all means, even at the expense of the personal feelings of the offender.”<sup>19</sup> Almost a century before him, evangelist Charles Finney observed that “Some men will spin out a long prayer in telling God who and what he is, or they exhort God to do so and so. Some pray out a whole system of divinity. Some preach, some exhort the people, till every body wishes they would stop, and God wishes so too, undoubtedly!”<sup>20</sup>

Leadership is the best remedy. Loving, spiritually sensitive, leadership is vital for effective prayer meetings, to gently correct missteps and encourage prayer that is considerate of others and keeps the glory of God as the goal. People need to be taught to pray together, and enthusiastic, practical direction from a facilitator makes a huge difference. A prayer covenant, such as the one included in the back of this work (please see Appendix Four), can be an excellent teaching tool for ensuring that everyone is “on the same page” regarding expectations. Part of the covenant can be read at the start by the leader as a way of keeping on target, or the group can read a

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<sup>19</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, Only A Prayer Meeting, , (Geanies House, Fearn and Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publishing, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Charles G. Finney, Lectures On Revival of Religion, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org), posted on August 5, 2006), p. 87.

portion silently. A covenant with a time commitment can also be an excellent way to encourage staying the course. In 1747, Jonathan Edwards asking ministers on both sides of the Atlantic to covenant to pray for the outpouring “of the Holy Spirit which shall bring on that advancement of Christ’s church and kingdom.” The commitment he asked for was seven years!<sup>21</sup>

Posting general directions for the meeting can also be a helpful way for leaders to communicate expectations. During the prayer revival which began in New York City in 1857-58, placards were posted in churches and halls encouraging participants to not exceed five minutes (!) in their prayers, and to not pray aloud more than twice.<sup>22</sup> Because many churches benefit from projection systems today, helpful guidelines can be easily displayed throughout a meeting. The following is an example of some contemporary guidelines for prayer meetings:

1. Arrive on time. Jesus is waiting to meet with us!
2. Pray briefly. God knows what you say before you say it.
3. Allow others time to pray. God wants to hear from them too!
4. Pray passionately. We worship a loving and powerful God!
5. Pray reverently. You are in the throne room of the King of Kings.
6. Listen quietly and reverently and follow the leading of the Spirit.
7. Pray expectantly. Expect great things from God!

Scripture verses encouraging devotion in prayer, photos of those prayed for (such as missionaries or members of the armed forces), topics for prayer, and the agenda for the meeting can also be posted (for an example of a simple prayer meeting format applicable for either small or large groups, please see Appendix Three).

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, V. 5., Edited by Stephen J. Stein. (New Haven, Connecticut and London, England: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 322-327.

<sup>22</sup> Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-58*, (Oxford, England and New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 103.

Another helpful tool for organizing meetings are prayer cards (for sharing praises, requests and answers to prayer). They enable those who are still uncomfortable praying aloud to have a voice, and ensure as many needs and requests are prayed for as possible. The cards can be read by the leader, or shared quietly among a few people at a time. Topical prayer cards, such as the “*Bookmark Prayer Cards*” published by *Pray!* Magazine (please see the resources for praying together in Appendix Two), offer inspirational thoughts for prayer that help encourage enthusiastic participation. There are suggestions on ways to praise God, praying for repentance, Scriptural blessings to pray for you children, life-giving prayers for your church, and many more.

Helpful as these resources are, they are no substitute for listening carefully to what God is doing as you pray together. Be sensitive to the Spirit, and how God is leading you as you pray. A clear need or theme may emerge, and you may feel led to move in that direction. Listen attentively as others pray, and pray along with them as God directs. You may want to quietly gently whisper encouragement (such as, “Yes, Lord!”) so that others know they are supported, and you are praying in agreement with them.

Most of all, be open to Jesus’ presence. He has promised to be there, and He will draw near as you watch and wait for Him. Pray expectantly, anticipating that He will answer, and “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>23</sup>

As the meeting draws to a close, end by thanking God for His faithfulness to hear and answer the prayers of those He loves. You may want to sing a song of

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<sup>23</sup> Philippians 4:7, NIV.

praise to Him. Take care to end punctually at a time you have all decided upon, unless the Lord is moving in another direction and there is a shared understanding that you need to stay longer in His presence.

### **Uniting The Church For Prayer**

There are so many ways for God's people to pray together! There are telephone and email prayer chains, prayer walks through areas of need, and neighborhood "houses of prayer." Some churches encourage their members to stop and pray, wherever they may be, and ask for God's blessing at a pre-set time. There are solemn assemblies, all-night prayer meetings, corporate fasts and concerts of prayer for times of conviction and need. There are pastors' prayer teams lifting up their shepherd's personal concerns, and "marketplace prayer" meetings in workplaces where Christians gather (for an example of such a meeting, please see appendix six). Many churches have rooms especially designated for prayer, with books, praise CD's, and other instructional materials. Others insert instructions for prayer during worship into a few of their bulletins, randomly inviting others to uplift the service while it is in progress. There are prayer affinity groups and prayer support groups where special interests are shared and interceded for. Some churches organize prayer partners and prayer retreats. There are also prayer vigils and watches, where members sign up to pray around the clock (for more information on these and other ways to pray together, please consult the resources in Appendix Two at the back of this work).

Together, your prayers make a difference. It has been said that “the church is the only army that marches forward on its knees.” There is progress that will not happen if you do not pray.

D.L. Moody was one of the most effective evangelists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. God used him powerfully to call others to Christ throughout the United States and Britain. But if you had been there when he first visited Cambridge University in the fall of 1882, you would have felt sorry for him.

The first night that Moody spoke to a packed crowd of undergraduates, they greeted his American accent with guffaws. The crowd heckled Moody’s simple speech and down to earth mannerisms and made fun of his song leader. One student, Gerald Lander, was interviewed afterwards and said “If uneducated men will come to teach the varsity, they deserve to be snubbed.”

The next day was not any better. The meeting was nearly rained out, and Moody later said he felt like he had “come up against a brick wall.” But he wouldn’t give up. Before meeting again that Tuesday, he called together a group of mothers to pray. Though the students were not their own children, a hundred and fifty mothers interceded passionately for them as if they were. Moody described the scene poignantly: “mother after mother, amidst her tears, pleaded for the young men of the university.” They finished the meeting with an assurance that God had heard their prayers and that help was on the way.

What happened that evening was very different from the two nights before. At Moody's invitation, fifty two young men gave their lives to Christ. Among them was Gerald Lander. His life transformed, he later became a missionary to China.<sup>24</sup>

God uses the teamwork of prayer to accomplish things that would not happen by any other means. God has elected to move through our prayers together. That is why one of the first things Jesus taught His disciples to pray was that His Kingdom would come.<sup>25</sup> And Paul wrote the Christians in Colosse from prison, "pray for us... that God may open a door for our message."<sup>26</sup>

Through united prayer, God opens doors which would otherwise remain locked and closed. His hand turns the lock, and prayer is the key He places in our hands. What if we try it together?

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<sup>24</sup> John Pollock, Moody. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1967), pp. 232-235.

<sup>25</sup> Matt. 6:10, Luke 11:2 NIV.

<sup>26</sup> Col. 4:4, NIV.

## **Chapter Eight:**

### **More Than We Ask Or Imagine**

***Wrestling For A Blessing: Persevering and Prevailing Together***

If God's love to one of his people is a reason for answering his requests, if there be ten present, there is ten times the reason.

C.H. Spurgeon, "Prayer Meetings"<sup>1</sup>

Once upon a time there was a king who had seven sons and seven daughters. He was a kind and wise king, who loved each of his children equally. He was also immensely wealthy, and provided generously for his children beyond their needs.

As they became of age, the sons and daughters of the king were sent out to accomplish their father's work. Because they loved their father, they went gladly and labored long in the land, and the kingdom was blessed.

As the children grew in their love for their father's kingdom, each of them came to have the same wish. It was a good wish that would benefit the kingdom greatly, and they were certain their father would grant it as soon as they asked. So they sent the eldest brother to make the request.

He returned, looking puzzled.

"What did Father say?" the others asked.

"He did not say yes, and I do not know why. He simply said, 'Bring one of your sisters, and have her ask me.'"

So the eldest sister went with him, and together they sought the favor of the king.

They returned, more perplexed than ever.

"What happened?" the others inquired of the sister.

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, "Prayer Meetings," in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 60:526.

“He did not say yes.” she answered. He only said, “Bring one of your brothers, and have him ask me.”

And so the matter repeated itself, until in time, all of the sons and daughters were standing together before the king. Each of them had asked, and each time the answer was the same.

“Father,” they inquired, “Do you not agree that this request is good and helpful?”

The king studied each of their faces thoughtfully, and smiled kindly.

“Why don’t you ask again?” he said quietly.

So ask they did.

“Done!” the king commanded, and immediately the matter was carried out.

“We do not understand, Father.”

The king motioned for them to come near.

“I love all of you dearly,” he replied. “Make no mistake about that. Each of you has a very special place in my heart. But when I see all of you together, agreeing on what is good, my heart overflows, and the kingdom cannot contain my joy. Ask what you will, for all that I have is yours.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Loved At Our Father’s Throne**

Our Heavenly Father deeply values our prayers together. Jesus told us that ‘if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.’<sup>3</sup> Because of what Jesus has done for us, we always have access to

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<sup>2</sup> Illustration composed by the author for this work.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 18:19, NIV.

the throne room of the Father. “We can approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”<sup>4</sup> It is the greatest privilege and opportunity imaginable.

When we ask together according to our Father’s will, He has promised to answer. We are to ask in Jesus’ name, with His purposes at heart. Jesus said, “My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. *Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*”<sup>5</sup>

God desires for believers in every century to discover the joy of prayer. When Jesus tells the disciples to “ask,” the grammatical tense of the original language (the *present active imperative*) implies that Jesus is not only *commanding* his disciples to ask, He also wants them to be in the habit of *asking continually*.

Whatever time in history we may live in, God will continually receive us because of our relationship with Jesus. We are commanded to go before Him in prayer, and welcomed with love when we come humbly, as Jesus did: “In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me.”<sup>6</sup> When we bow together before our Father’s throne, our prayers are a prelude to heaven itself. Our Heavenly Father loves us, and loves it when we pray!

### **Praying Together for the Kingdom**

Jesus also commands us to ask *together*. Not only is Jesus’ command in the plural (“all of you ask”), He gave it in the moments immediately before He prayed for

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<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 4:16, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> John 16:23-24, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> John 16:26-27, NIV.

the unity of all believers.<sup>7</sup> Because our unity in His Spirit is so important, God has directly linked it to His willingness to answer prayer, and to our joy!

The Kingdom moves forward on our prayers. We must never underestimate the strategic importance of uniting in prayer to accomplish God's purposes. John Piper notes that "God appoints prayer as the means of finishing a mission that He has promised will certainly be finished. Therefore we pray, not because the outcome is uncertain, but because God has promised and cannot fail. Our prayers are the means God has appointed to do what He will most certainly do—finish the great commission and establish His kingdom."<sup>8</sup> Even the smallest church or most unlikely group of believers off the beaten path of society and culture may be strategically placed to accomplish God's will and purpose in a given moment.

One of the first things Jesus taught His disciples to pray for was that the Kingdom would come.<sup>9</sup> Could it be that the Kingdom has tarried because God has ordained that it will only come when we pray, and we have not prayed together long or hard enough? Billy Graham once said that "There are three things necessary for a successful crusade. The first is prayer, the second is prayer, and the third is prayer."<sup>10</sup> The relationship between prayer and the Kingdom's progress is solidly scriptural. God's Word reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."<sup>11</sup> It also tells us that "though we

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<sup>7</sup> John 17:1-26, NIV.

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, *A Godward Life*, (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1997), p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2, NIV.

<sup>10</sup> Cited by Robert O. Bakke, *The Power of Extraordinary Prayer*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2000), p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 6:12, NIV.

live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”<sup>12</sup> We are in a battle of cosmic proportion, and eternal souls hang in the balance. United prayer is the most effective weapon God has given us, because through it, we call down His power and blessing. Prayer precedes all other work of the Kingdom. As Jonathan Edwards observed, “most of the remarkable deliverances and restorations of the church of God in the Scriptures were in answer to prayer.”<sup>13</sup>

### **But You Promised!**

What difference could be made in the world today if we ask for what God has already promised to give? God is counting on us to play, and waits for us to bring His promises before Him. Jesus’ instructed us to “Ask the Lord of the harvest... to send out workers into His harvest field.”<sup>14</sup> He would never command us to pray for that which He would not willingly offer!

God’s promises are as certain as His character. The potential of our prayers is as unlimited as His power. The seed of our faith may be small, but placed in His hand, its potential cannot be measured. As someone wise once said, “we can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed.” E.M. Bounds underscores how vital God’s promises are for our prayers:

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, NIV.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth.” The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume II, (Peabody: MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998). p. 292.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 9:38, NIV.

God's promises cover all things which pertain to life and godliness, which relate to body and soul, which have to do with time and eternity. These promises bless the present and stretch out their benefactions to the illimitable and eternal future. Prayer holds these promises in keeping and in fruition. Promises are God's golden fruit to be plucked by the hand of prayer.<sup>15</sup>

What would happen if we risked more in the effort and reached a little higher, stretching to grasp the promises that are ripe for the picking?

Praying God's promises enables us to keep our focus on what matters most. We pray His Word and His purposes back to Him. We bear witness of His power to save, to protect, to provide, to bless, to heal and to set free. We pray that way not because God needs to be reminded of what He has promised, but in order that we, like David, may "strengthen ourselves in the Lord," and our faith may be encouraged and refreshed.<sup>16</sup>

It is not impertinence to pray, "Father, You promised!" when He has commanded us to ask. If imperfect, earthly parents are moved by that request, how much more so is a perfect Father in Heaven? One of the most poignant examples of this kind of prayer in the Bible is found in the story of Jacob, in the moments before he meets his brother Esau after a long and bitter parting of the ways.

Jacob feared for his life and his family. He had good reason to be afraid of Esau. Jacob had deceived him and stolen his birthright, and Esau held a grudge against him and planned to kill him.<sup>17</sup> But Jacob also knew that God had promised to bless him, so the night before he met Esau, he reminded the Lord of what He had

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<sup>15</sup> E.M. Bounds, The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds On Prayer, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), p. 153.

<sup>16</sup> I Samuel 30:6, NASB.

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 27:41, NIV.

promised: “*But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’*”<sup>18</sup>

Because God could be trusted, even Jacob (whose name means figuratively “*he deceives*”) was bold enough to pray, “But you promised, Father!” Jacob knew that God’s promises were reliable simply because God is faithful, not because he somehow deserved them.

Later that night Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord. The match took its toll—he would limp for the rest of his life. But it ended with Jacob “prevailing,” and saying “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”<sup>19</sup> In response, he hears these thought-provoking words: “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because *you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.*”<sup>20</sup>

### **Prevailing Together**

How could anyone struggle with God, and “overcome?” It could only happen if God allows it. Why does God sometimes want us to struggle in our prayers? Because He wants us to overcome!

When my children were younger, we used to arm wrestle frequently. Because I love my children, I would often let them “win.” If I gave in too easily, they would tell me, “Come on, Daddy! Try harder!” So I “struggled” and “strained” and “exerted” myself until they threw all of their weight into it, used both arms, and finally “won.” Then we all cheered together.

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 32:12, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 32:26, NIV.

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 32:28, NIV, emphasis mine.

Struggling in prayer builds the muscles of our faith, and teaches us perseverance. It is spiritual “resistance training.” When answers to our prayers do not come when we think they should, and we find ourselves having to pray harder than we ever have before, there is something of great worth to be gained. God tells us His people that “you will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all of your heart.” When we struggle together in prayer, it keeps us continually before the Father. It causes us to search His Word, and seek the leading of His Spirit. The Spirit reveals to us how we should pray and what we should pray for, because “the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”<sup>21</sup>

When we struggle in prayer and prevail, God does not change His will. He drives us to a deeper recognition of it, and rejoices when we “win.” Donald Bloesch explains, “We wrestle with God in order to discover the fuller scope of His will, and our success in this endeavor is therefore also God’s victory. God accomplishes His purposes through the striving and pleading of His children.”<sup>22</sup>

When we persist in bringing a matter before God, it does not necessarily mean we are not submitting ourselves to God’s will. Jesus prayed through the night in the Garden of Gethsemane and asked God to “Take this cup from me,” all the while saying “yet not My will, but Yours be done.”<sup>23</sup> The Bible tells us that “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and *He was heard because of His*

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<sup>21</sup> I Corinthians 2:10, NIV.

<sup>22</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, The Struggle of Prayer, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Helmers and Howard Publishers, 1988), pp. 76-77.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 22:42; see also Mark 14:36, Matthew 26:39, NIV.

*reverent submission.*”<sup>24</sup> Often, it is because we *are submitted* that we struggle. We know the One who has promised, and that encourages us to pray with that much more passion and persistence. How could we do anything less?

God encourages us to persist in our prayers in His Word. Immediately after He taught the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus told the parable of a man who knocked on the door of a friend after midnight, asking for bread for his children. “Because of the man’s boldness,” he was given what he asked for (not because he was a friend!).<sup>25</sup> Jesus also used the illustration of a persistent widow receiving justice from an unjust judge, asking “will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off?”<sup>26</sup> Because God loves us and calls us His friends, we have all the more reason to persist!

Paul told the church in Colosse that his helper Epaphrus was “always wrestling in prayer for you.”<sup>27</sup> He also urged the church in Rome to “strive together with me in your prayers.”<sup>28</sup> Faith shows itself in the struggle. As Bloesch points out, “The prayer of faith is importunate, agonizing prayer. God gives His promises without regard to our merits, but these promises must be claimed by faith.”<sup>29</sup> Our faith and confidence is never in ourselves, but in our Father’s love and character. God Himself invites us to come. He welcomes us with open arms. When we persist in reaching for God’s promises, there may be lessons to be learned, and growing to be

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<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 5:7, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup> Luke 11:5-8, NIV.

<sup>26</sup> Luke 18:7, NIV.

<sup>27</sup> Colossians 4:12, NIV.

<sup>28</sup> Romans 15:30, NASB.

<sup>29</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, The Struggle of Prayer, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Helmers and Howard Publishers, 1988), p. 78.

done. But once the fruit is firmly in hand, we find the struggle has made it sweeter still.

### **More Than We Ask Or Imagine**

God blesses people who pray together. The Bible tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He *rewards* those who earnestly seek Him.”<sup>30</sup> It is always worth the effort, even if results seem to be slow in coming, or are different from what we imagined when we began to ask. Prayer is never futile. “True prayer is always true power,” Spurgeon observed. “You may not always get what you ask, but you shall always have your real wants supplied. When God does not answer His children according to the letter, He does so according to the Spirit.”<sup>31</sup>

Jesus said that “the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.”<sup>32</sup> Passionate, expectant praying reaches for what God alone can do, and prevails in His way. The poetic later stanzas of William Cowper’s masterful hymn “*God Moves In A Mysterious Way*” are on point here:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan God’s work in vain;  
He is His own Interpreter, and He will make it plain.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 11:6, NIV, emphasis mine.

<sup>31</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Morning and Evening. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers: 2000), p. 617.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 11:12, NIV.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Kenneth W. Osbeck. Amazing Grace, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications: 1990), p. 25.

Several years ago when I was going through a particularly difficult time, a minister I greatly admired pulled me aside at a conference we were attending. He said, “I would like to ask you to pray with me. Let’s covenant to pray Ephesians 3:14-21 for each other for the next 30 days.” While we prayed for each other, I contracted a water-borne micro-organism and had to be hospitalized for several days. Things seemed to go from bad to worse. But in the hospital, my relationship with God deepened, and I was affirmed of His love in a powerful and lasting way.

When we persevere in prayer together, we discover how God truly is able to do “immeasurably *more* than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.”<sup>34</sup> Bryan Chapell writes of how during the 1950s, three pastors in Scotland met together faithfully to pray for revival. At the end of four years of fervent prayer, they had not seen a change, and were disappointed...

Twenty five years later, these same ministers hosted a conference for Bible-believing ministers who had begun to fill the pastoral ranks. About two hundred pastors came—roughly one third of all Scottish ministers. One of the three pastors who had prayed for this increase asked for a show of hands by those who had been converted during those initial four years of prayer. A number in the room raised their hands... Then the conference leader asked those present who had been born during those four years to raise a hand. Most of the rest of the pastors then raised a hand. God had answered the prayer of the original three ministers in a way they could not have expected.<sup>35</sup>

When we pray together in Jesus’ name, God’s power is poured out in ways that exceed our comprehension. No wonder Jesus insisted so passionately that “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations!”<sup>36</sup> If we want to see real change in our world and true progress for the kingdom of God, we must reach for

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<sup>34</sup> Ephesians 3:20, emphasis mine.

<sup>35</sup> Bryan Chapell (relating a story told to him by Eric Alexander), Praying Backwards, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), p. 167.

<sup>36</sup> Mark 11:17, NIV.

what He alone can do. Spurgeon once again is helpful: *“Am I to do any great work for God? Then I must first be mighty upon my knees.”*<sup>37</sup>

Together, we are stronger than we ever could be on our own. It is not our strength, but God’s, Who has promised His presence when two or more seek Him on their knees. How will He answer? What will He do? What blessings will only come from His hand if we ask?

There is only one way to find out.

Our Father is waiting. The door to the throne room is open, and we are welcomed with love and anticipation.

Let’s ask Him together.

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<sup>37</sup> Spurgeon, “The Preparatory Prayer,” in The C.H. Spurgeon Collection, 56:9.

## **Appendix One:**

### **Chapter Discussion Questions**

## **Chapter One: “Me? Pray With Others?”**

1. What comes to mind when you think of prayer meetings?
2. If you were to tell Martin Luther “I’m too busy to pray,” what might he say in response?
3. What did Jesus say about the importance of praying together in Matthew 18:18? Do you ever draw a correlation between praying together, and God answering prayer?
4. Do you agree that Christian influence on society has decreased since churches have stepped away from prolonged prayer together? Why or why not?
5. What role does heartfelt, united prayer play in your personal life? In the life of your church?
6. Do you see praying together as an opportunity, or a burden? Explain.

## **Chapter Two: The Lost Art of Praying Together**

1. If you had a box of prayers that were unanswered because they were unasked for, what would be in it?
2. Why were Moses, Aaron and Hur actually praying when Israel fought the Amalekites (Exodus 17)? What was a common posture of prayer in the Old Testament?
3. What was Moses' and Aaron's body language before God when they interceded in prayer during the rebellion of Korah (Numbers 16)? Why is this actually praying?
4. What did Daniel ask his three friends to do when his life was in danger? What did God do as a result?
5. Why did Spurgeon compare praying together to the secret of Samson's strength?
6. What is a "concert of prayer?" How did Jonathan Edwards describe united prayer?

### **Chapter Three: Praying With Jesus Then and Now**

1. Have you ever been asked to pray spontaneously in a group? What was your response?
2. What are some examples of Jesus praying with others in the New Testament?
3. How does the Lord's Prayer provide instruction for people to pray *together*?
4. When Jesus cautioned against praying in front of others, was he against any kind of public prayer? What was He talking about?
5. Andrew Murray compared a Christian's prayer life to a tree. What did he mean?
6. How did Jesus demonstrate "helplessness" while He was on earth?
7. Why is Jesus uniquely present when Christians pray together?

## Chapter Four: Catching The Wind

1. What did the disciples do when they were waiting for the gift Jesus had promised?
2. What did Luke say the disciples did *after* the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost?
3. Which came first for the early church: prayer or action? Why is this important?
4. What was the first worship service in Europe?
5. What did Paul and Silas do when they were thrown into prison?
6. How does the Revelation describe God treasuring the prayers of the saints?
7. What did Samuel Chadwick mean when he said that, “Prayer makes all things possible?”

## **Chapter Five: Where Two Or More**

1. Why does our Heavenly Father want us to pray, according to Jesus in Luke 11:11-13?
2. How many people did the “prayer meeting revival” begin with? What happened as a result?
3. What is the first fruit of the Spirit? How does it evidence itself when we pray together?
4. What did both Charles Finney and Dietrich Bonhoeffer feel was a key to uniting church members who were at odds with each other? Why?
5. How does the spiritual maturity of other believers benefit us when we pray together?
6. What lesson did John Wesley learn from the Moravians while traveling to America? How did praying together help them have peace in the middle of a violent storm?
7. What are the three gifts God gives to those who truly pray together?

## **Chapter Six: “Lord, Bend Me!”**

1. Why must prayer precede action? How did John and Sally learn this lesson?
2. What did Paul tell the Philippians would lead to having God’s peace in their hearts and minds?
3. What did Nehemiah do before rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem? Why did this make his actions more effective?
4. During the Welsh Revival, when Evan Roberts prayed, “Lord, bend me!” what did he mean?
5. Where do you fall on the prayer-action continuum? Are you “more prayer,” or “more action?” How do you strike the balance between both of them?
6. What did E.M. Bounds say can happen when we are “too busy to pray?”

## **Chapter Seven: The Teamwork of Prayer**

1. Are you a Mary or a Martha? Explain.
2. What do you think would have happened if Martha had asked Jesus to help with the meal? Why?
3. What is the best way to encourage others to pray?
4. What did Henry Ward Beecher say about those who feel awkward about praying in front of others?
5. What is one of the greatest distractions for people who pray together? What is the best remedy?
6. How can a “covenant of prayer” be helpful? How long did Jonathan Edwards want to covenant with others to pray for revival?
7. What did D.L. Moody do when he felt like he had “come up against a brick wall? What happened as a result?

## **Chapter Eight: More Than We Ask Or Imagine**

1. Why did the king not answer the prayers of his children individually?
2. Why is Jesus command to ask the Father also a command to ask together?  
What is the context of that command in the Gospel of John?
3. What is the first thing that Jesus taught the disciples to pray for? Is this a priority in your prayers as well?
4. Why can we be assured of an answer when we pray God's promises?
5. How did Jacob struggle with God and "overcome?" Does God change His will when we struggle in prayer and prevail?
6. Why does God want us to "struggle" in prayer?
7. What parables did Jesus use to teach us to persist in prayer?
8. What did C.H. Spurgeon say is the prerequisite of doing any great work for God?

## **Appendix Two:**

### **Resources For Encouraging United Prayer**

### **Books and Periodicals:**

1. Fresh Encounters, by Daniel Henderson (NavPress, 2004): This work provides a description of worship-based prayer in the local church.
2. The Prayer Saturated Church, by Cheryl Sacks (NavPress, 2004): This book, which includes a CD of resources, offers instruction for helping a church become a house of prayer.
3. The Praying Church Idea Book, by Douglas A. Kamstra (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2001): This resource provides numerous concepts for individual and united prayer.
4. The Praying Church Source Book, by Alvin J. Vander Griend (C.R.C. Publications, 1997): This work includes essays on prayer, strategies for praying churches, and stories of praying Christians.
5. The Presence Based Church, by Terry Teykl (Prayer Point Press, 2003): This book examines the difference between program and prayer driven churches.
6. *Pray! Magazine*, P.O. Box 35004, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80935-3504: This magazine offers ideas, insights and resources for individual and united prayer efforts.

**Computer Websites:**

1. *WWW.HARVESTPRAYER.COM*: A site providing biblical and practical help for congregations desiring to become “houses of prayer.”
2. *WWW.NATIONALPRAYER.ORG*: The site of the National Prayer Committee and a resource for the National Day of Prayer.
3. *WWW.PRAYERLEADER.COM*: A site providing assistance for individuals leading united prayer efforts.
4. *WWW.RENEWALMINISTRIES.COM*: A site assisting pastors and local churches in furthering individual and united prayer, and the development of church prayer rooms.

**Videos and Materials:**

1. “The Role of Prayer In Spiritual Awakening,” by J. Edwin Orr. This is a VHS format video about the importance of united prayer for revival throughout history. It is available through the website of Campus Crusade For Christ: *www.gocccc.com*.

2. “My House, A House of Prayer,” by Jim Cymbala. This is a VHS format video of a sermon given at the 1994 Praise Gathering in Indianapolis, Indiana, on the vital need for united prayer in the contemporary church. It can be purchased at the website store of Life Action Revival Ministries: [www.resources.lifeaction.org](http://www.resources.lifeaction.org).

3. “Bookmark Prayer Cards.” A variety of Scripture-based cards designed to encouraged individual or group prayer, available for purchase through *Pray! Magazine*, P.O. Box 35004, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80935-3504.

### **Appendix Three:**

#### **A Simple Prayer Meeting**

The purpose of a simple prayer meeting is to encourage as much time in the Lord's presence as possible. A prayer meeting is an appointment with God. The more components are added to a service, the more distraction from the ultimate goal of spending time at Jesus' feet and persevering in fervent prayer together. The basic outline below, which provides both variation and flexibility for small or large groups, is designed to allow as much time for prayer as possible. This approach encourages prayer to begin within five minutes. It moves quickly initially, but this is intentional, because prayer meetings can easily bog down with small talk in the opening minutes. The meeting is designed to last for one hour, but can be done in fewer for a lunch-time or "marketplace" prayer meeting.

### **A Simple Prayer Meeting**

#### **Welcome:**

Begin with informal greeting welcoming all. Do not discuss particular needs as this time. Three minutes is sufficient.

#### **Reading God's Word:**

A brief Scripture passage encouraging prayer or the planned theme for the evening are read at this time. Little or no comment is needed—allow the Word of God to stand on its own, limiting any explanation to a sentence or two. Instead of any comment, a brief testimony (two minutes maximum) may be given.

### **A Moment of Silence:**

Spend a moment quieting your heart before the Lord, confessing any sin and entering lovingly and reverently into His presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you and help you to pray. One minute can be surprising effective. More than two minutes tends to be distracting for shorter attention spans and therefore counterproductive.

### **Praying Together: Three Components**

***Entering God's Gates:*** Effective praying starts with heartfelt worship, because it encourages faith in our matchless God. The leader begins energetically, with a brief prayer of praise and thanks that welcomes others to join in. A worship chorus which is also a prayer may be sung at the beginning. Encourage people to discipline themselves to spend several minutes in adoration, *before a single request is made*. Use Psalm 100:4, with the mental image of entering the temple, as your model: "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name." Encourage people to search their Bibles for verses of praise to pray aloud, or distribute prayer card encouraging praise at the beginning of the meeting (please see Appendix Two).

***Bowing Before His Throne:*** Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as to when to begin with requests (sometimes the entire meeting may be spent in praise; at other times you may move more quickly into urgent needs, or be led into a time of listening and silence). Requests are best shared by simply praying about them. This maximizes time in prayer, enabling you to go straight to the One who can do

something about the need. By addressing God you inform all of the needs at hand, while removing the temptation to gossip about others. God knows each need, so the actual description of circumstances should be brief and not drawn out. Needs may also be shared by distributing prayer request cards for individuals to pray aloud (screen them for confidentiality purposes beforehand). The cards may be collected earlier during a worship service, or filled out as the meeting begins. The leader may also help maintain momentum by asking those who feel comfortable praying before others to lift up particular need aloud. This may be done by asking others by name, or simply requesting a volunteer to pray.

For groups larger than twenty, it is advisable to break up into pairs or threes when praying for requests. Allow people two to three minutes to group share their requests conversationally among themselves before praying together (a gentle reminder that “you should begin praying now” after three minutes is helpful). Requests requiring the prayer of all may be briefly shared by the leader while people are clustered in small groups.

In groups of all sizes, be sure to encourage agreement in prayer while others are praying aloud. Praying for a need more than once, or joining in with a gentle “Yes, Lord” or “Please, Father” lets others know that their needs are being heard with love.

***Look Forward In Faith:*** Express confidence in God’s ability to answer prayer. The importance of emphasizing God’s faithfulness cannot be overstated. *Thank God* that He hears your prayers and will answer with perfect wisdom. Thank Him in advance for the answers that will come to your prayers. Matthew 13:58 tells

us that Jesus did not do many miracles in his hometown “because of their lack of faith.” Prayer meetings that end without faith will see little or nothing happen as a result of praying. Pray expectantly, and quote God’s promises in Scripture for the needs at hand.

Conclude the meeting with a brief prayer of thanks, or with a simple worship chorus which is also a prayer. A brief, uplifting verse may also be read.

## **Appendix Four:**

### **A Covenant For Praying Together**

I covenant to pray with other Christians out of obedience to Jesus' command and example (Matthew 6:9, 9:38, 18:19-20; Luke 9:29). I recognize there are blessings God will only give if we join together in prayer (John 16:23-24).

I will endeavor to be supportive and encouraging of others as we pray, and to *"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3). I covenant to pray before I arrive, so that I may seek God humbly and from the heart (2 Chronicles 7:14). I will prepare myself by asking for God's forgiveness and repenting of my sins, so that my prayers may be heard (Psalm 66:18). I will be kind and compassionate to others, forgiving them just as God has forgiven me through Jesus (Ephesians 4:32).

I covenant to listen as well as to pray, seeking to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit (John 10:3, Ephesians 6:18). I will not delay the meeting by talking too much (Ecclesiastes 5:2). I will be attentive to Jesus' presence, because He has promised to join us in a special way when we pray together (Matthew 18:20). I will recognize that I am in His presence, and that it is not the place for me to preach to others or instruct them while I pray (Psalm 46:10). I will address God alone with a reverent heart (Jeremiah 33:3). I will also make my spoken prayers brief, so that others may have the opportunity to pray aloud themselves and our time may be shared equally (1 Thessalonians 5:19). I covenant to pray through the whole meeting, whether I am praying aloud or praying silently (1 Thessalonians 5:17). I recognize that it is not our words that matter, but our hearts before God (Matthew 6:7).

I covenant to arrive on time, so that I will not be a distraction to others as they pray together (1 Corinthians 14:40). I will attend faithfully in order to be an

encouragement to others (Hebrews 10:25). I will also be supportive of our leader's efforts to help us begin and end on time, so that we can minimize time in conversation and maximize our time in prayer (Hebrews 13:17, Ephesians 5:21, Isaiah 55:6).

I will keep God's glory and His kingdom a priority in my prayers, because it is the first thing Jesus taught us to ask for (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2, Revelation 22:20). I will seek to pray in unity and love with my brothers and sisters in Christ, so that our Heavenly Father will answer our prayers (Matthew 18:19, Colossians 3:12-14). I will guard against gossip and keep private matters confidential for the good of all (Proverbs 11:13, 2 Corinthians 12:20).

I will pray in faith, believing that God answers prayer with all wisdom, and has called me to know the joy of receiving answers to prayer (James 1:5-6, John 16:24). I will stand on God's promises to His people, trusting that He will keep them in His perfect way (Hebrews 10:23). I will pray for my brothers and sisters while we are apart, that we may be faithful witnesses to Jesus wherever we may be (Colossians 4:2-4). I will watch expectantly for God to move in response to our prayers, and believe that He is *"able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us; to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen"* (Ephesians 3:20).

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(Signature)

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(Date)

## **Appendix Five:**

### **Composing A Concert of Prayer**

A “concert of prayer” is (by definition) a “concerted prayer effort.” It is sometimes compared to a symphony, in the regard that it is able to bring many voices together to pray in unison, and has many parts. The following is an example of a simple outline or “composition” for a concert of prayer:

### **Prelude**

1. Welcome
2. Scriptural precedents for praying together
3. Joining together in small groups for prayer.

### **First Movement**

1. Confessing our sin and humbling ourselves before God.
2. Professing our inadequacy and God’s complete sufficiency
3. Inviting God’s Spirit to fill, lead and direct our prayer together.

### **Second Movement**

1. Intercession for particular needs or a stated purpose.
2. Listening before God and quieting ourselves in His presence.
3. Praying about matters God has brought to mind.

### **Third Movement**

1. Prayer for unity in the body of Christ.
2. Prayer for the harvest and evangelization of our nation and world.
3. Prayer for the Kingdom to come.

### **Finale**

1. Praying for power to live as God’s faithful and obedient servants

2. Prayers of faith in God's ability to answer prayer and thanks for what He will do as a direct result of our praying together.
3. Prayers of praise.

## **Appendix Six:**

### **A “Marketplace Prayer” Meeting**

“Marketplace prayer” is an exciting development in the church today. More Christians are joining together in quiet corners of their workplaces and schools to seek God’s presence and power. The following is a brief, twenty minute timeline for a “marketplace” prayer meeting during lunch.

**12:05 PM:** Informal welcome and invitation to feel free to eat lunch quietly while you pray together. State the theme or focus for the meeting, if you have one. Explain the “three minute warning” (see below”) and that you need to begin immediately as your time is brief. Encourage others to make special prayer needs known by simply praying them.

**12:07 PM:** Begin prayer by reading a brief prayer promise from Scripture, such as Jeremiah 33:2-3, II Chronicles 7:14-15.

**12:22 PM:** Provide a gentle reminder that you will pray together for three more minutes (you can simply say “Three minutes!”). Doing this consistently will help you remain good stewards of your time and your witness as a Christian in your workplace.

**12:25 PM:** End promptly with a brief chorus, even if someone is still praying while you begin to sing (it is easier to interrupt with singing than with speaking). State the time and place of your next meeting.

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